00140936

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

WHISPERS *from* FAIRYLAND

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO.
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

WHISPERS FROM FAIRYLAND

BY THE RT. HON.

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, M.P.

AUTHOR OF 'STORIES FOR MY CHILDREN' 'MOONSHINE' 'QUEER FOLK' ETC

142936

3354.

THE LOST PRINCE

LONDON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

1877

All rights reserved

Good
823
Hug | whi
140936

00140936

TO THE

MOTHERS OF ENGLAND.

DEAR LADIES,

So many of you have spoken kind words to me of my books for children, that I venture to dedicate to you that which I have just finished.

It is difficult to please all readers. The child just out of the nursery, the young lady 'in the schoolroom,' the school-boy, and the 'grown-up children' who do me the honour to read my books, cannot all be exactly suited in every story. Sometimes I am too 'old,' sometimes too 'young' for my readers. But to your kindly judgment I readily and humbly submit my present volume. I hope and believe that, whatever may be its defects, there is nothing in it which can do harm or teach evil lessons to the child-world, which I love so well. Were it otherwise, I should not be bold enough to dedicate it to that body of English women whom, above all others, I respect and admire; because it is to them and to their guidance of the home-life of their children that England has owed her greatness in time past and will continue to owe the same in that future for and in which those children have to work.

I am yours most respectfully,

E. H. KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN.

God
823
Hug

PREFACE.

I HOPE no one will blame me for the title which I have ventured to choose for my new book of Fairy Tales. There is no particular reason why such tales should not be spoken out in a loud voice, but there is something more mysterious and Fairy-like in a 'whisper,' and therefore I have chosen the word. There would be something inappropriate in 'Bawls from Fairy-land,' 'Shrieks,' or 'Yells' would be wholly out of the question, there is a sulky sound about 'Mutterings,' and 'Howls' would be extremely objectionable. So, upon the whole, I prefer 'Whispers;' and, indeed, the title is all the more appropriate, because it is in this tone of voice that the little elves generally impart information to those whom they honour with their confidence.

Through the rustling leaves in the soft summer evenings; in the hay-fields after the hay-makers have gone home, and the old white owl flits slowly along in her search after the field mice, who are no longer shielded from her sight by the long grass; early in the mornings before the world of man is astir, and whilst the world of nature is still quiet and fresh—at such times the Fairy-whispers come to me ever and again; gentle, pleasant whispers they are, and they tell such strange things, that I cannot keep them to myself. So I cast them forth for my child-friends to read and interpret for themselves, and if they cannot understand them all, only let them tell me so, and I will ask for a full explanation the very next time I go to Fairyland.

CONTENTS.

		PAGE
I.	THE LOST PRINCE.	1
II.	THE HISTORY OF A ROOK	74
III.	THE SILVER FAIRIES	103
IV.	THE WITCHES' ISLAND	173
V.	HARRY'S DREAM	236
VI.	THE RED BARON	280
VII.	THE TWO ETONIANS	331

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

ILLUSTRATIONS.

		PAGE
THE LOST PRINCE	*to face*	1
THE GIANT PATTLE-PERRY	"	41
THE SILVER FAIRIES	"	122
MOLLY AND THE DEVIL-FISH	"	173
THE WITCHES' ISLAND	"	221
HARRY'S DREAM	"	274
THE RED BARON	"	287
THE TWO ETONIANS	"	330

THE LOST PRINCE.

Whispers from Fairyland.

I.

THE LOST PRINCE.

THERE was once a King who ruled over a people faithful to his dynasty, and contented with his government. His country was prosperous, his arms successful, his power great, and the splendour of his court unrivalled. Nor was this all; his Queen was a lady of surpassing beauty and amiable disposition; his domestic happiness was complete, and he was blessed with a son and two daughters, who were all that their parents could desire. Fortune seemed to have smiled upon that happy family, and nothing was wanting to render their existence one of unalloyed bliss. At the birth of each child good fairies had attended with presents and good wishes, and everything promised a long and joyful career to the children of those royal parents.

It was not until the youthful Prince had attained the age of ten years that the shadow of misfortune first fell upon the King's house, and darkened an existence which had hitherto been one of unmitigated joy and tranquillity. The little Prince

had been christened Mirabel, but from his lively and cheerful disposition had been usually called by the short and tender designation of Prince Merry. He had dark hair and grey eyes, his form was graceful and agile, his limbs well shaped, and his features decidedly handsome.

According to the custom of that country, his dress was richly ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, and he wore a girdle which was thickly set with jewels. One of these having become detached the boy, somehow or other, contrived one day to inflict a severe scratch upon his thigh, and although the wound speedily healed, the scar remained, and caused a certain disfigurement which his mother and nurses greatly regretted. One of the toes of his left foot moreover, was somewhat curiously shaped, for all the world as if it had been cut in half, or rather as if a piece had been cut out of the middle, for it was a perfect toe, only very much shorter than the ordinary run of toes; and besides this, he had upon one of his arms a strange blue mark not commonly observable upon a child's limb. All these, however, were but trifling defects, and in no way interfered with the young Prince's comfort.

He was about ten, as I have already remarked, when something more serious befell him than a mere personal blemish. Having been sent out one fine summer's afternoon with his favourite nursery-maid, the latter took him for a ramble in the large forest which joined up to the palace gardens. Somehow or other one of the soldiers of the King's guard happened to be off duty, and walking in the same direction.

As this soldier chanced, by the merest accident, to be a particular friend of the nursery-maid, nothing was more natural than that they should stop and converse together. In fact, they sat down upon a bench under one of the big forest trees, and chatted away so much to their mutual satisfaction that the moments slipped by without either of them taking any account of time. Suddenly, however, the loud sound of the palace dressing bell fell upon their ears, and they became aware of the fact that they had greatly outstayed the limit of time allowed for the young Prince's walk. Up they started in some consternation, which was enormously increased when they found that Prince Merry was no longer with them. The nursery-maid called him in vain, then the soldier raised his louder voice, but with a similar result, and they both commenced a hurried and eager search in every direction. But their search was fruitless. The young Prince had disappeared.

In vain they made the forest re-echo with his name; there was no answer, and a silence reigned around which struck deep terror into their trembling hearts. They stayed as long as they dared, and at last returned to the palace in a dreadful state of alarm. The nursery-maid rushed frantically to the nurse, told her tale with incoherent vehemence, and went into a violent fit of hysterics, from which she was only recovered by a liberal application of cold water.

It was some time before anyone dared to inform the King of the loss of the son to whom he was so devotedly attached. His Majesty was playing billiards with the Lord Chamberlain, and as the latter took very good care to be beaten, was in high good

humour, and quite prepared to forgive the Queen, who had gone out driving, for being, as she certainly would be, late for dinner.

But those who knew the monarch's fondness for his child, trembled with apprehension at the thought of breaking to him the melancholy news. It could not, however, be long concealed, and the disappearance of the young Prince was announced by the Hereditary Grand Pig-feeder, a nobleman of high descent, whose especial duty about the court was to superintend the supply of hams, bacon, and pickled pork, of which large quantities were daily consumed in the royal household. Entering the billiard room, he approached his sovereign with lowly obeisance, and kneeling upon one knee, presented to him a silver trough in which was deposited a note signed by three of the ministers, narrating the circumstance of the nursery-maid's arrival, and report of the catastrophe.

'Scarcely had the King read the missive through when his countenance turned deadly white, and then immediately flushed red with rage, as he flung his cue at the Lord Chamberlain, and the silver trough at the head of the Hereditary Grand Pig-feeder; then he used violent words (which I shall not repeat, in case any Kings should read this story, and be scandalised at hearing what strong language some of their royal race occasionally use, when their temper gets the better of them) and bounced about the room and the palace like a madman. Presently he gave orders that the nursery-maid should be sent to him, and after hearing all that she had to say, de-

clared that she should be instantly condemned to be eaten alive by white mice, and the soldier put into a bag full of hedgehogs and rolled down the side of the steepest precipice in that part of the world.

The unhappy maid wept bitterly and implored mercy in piteous terms; but it is doubtful whether she would have obtained it, had not the King's favourite jester (who generally turned out to be the wisest man at court) reminded the angry monarch that the nature of white mice was not such as to render it probable that they would do their part in carrying out the sentence, and that hedgehogs being exceedingly rare in that country, there would most likely be a great and undesirable delay in the execution of the soldier.

After a little while, the King seemed to become somewhat appeased, and turned his attention to the consideration of the best means of recovering his lost child. He ordered the forest to be thoroughly well searched, and sent servants and messengers far and wide along every road and pathway in the vicinity of the palace. While he was engaged in giving these commands, the Queen came in from her drive, and on being informed of the misfortune which had befallen her, gave vent to several shrill screams, and then fainted away. Some time was occupied in bringing Her Majesty back to consciousness, and when this had been effected, her state was truly pitiable to behold. She wept bitterly, let down her back hair, tore her best pocket-handkerchief, trampled her new bonnet underfoot, and scratched the faces of her Mistress of the Robes and the three principal Ladies in Waiting, to their great and visible consternation.

In short, she behaved in every respect as if she had been a mad woman, and upon the King's attempting to pacify her, she so far forgot her wifely duties as to box his royal ears, and with another wild shout of 'My child, my child!' relapsed into her fainting fit; from which the King thought it was by no means desirable that she should speedily revive, if the same scenes were to be re-enacted on her recovery. So they carried the poor Queen up to her bed-room, and left her quiet there until she came to once more, and appeared somewhat less agitated. Then the King paid her a visit, and, the first frenzy of grief being over, the royal pair wept in each other's arms over the disaster which they both had to endure.

The servants, messengers, and soldiers who had been sent to scour the country all returned without any tidings of the missing Prince. The wells were all examined, the ponds all emptied, the rivers dragged, but nothing could be found nor any trace of Prince Merry discovered by the searchers. For three days and three nights the search was continued in every direction, and at the end of that time the King and Queen no longer ventured to hope that their beloved son would be restored to them.

But what, in the name of all that was mysterious, could possibly have become of him? The wild beasts in that country were few and far between, and if any savage animal had seized the boy, his cries would surely have attracted the attention of the maid and soldier, and even if this had not been the case, some marks of his seizure, such as blood, torn raiment, and signs of struggling would surely have been left behind.

Robbers were almost unknown in the kingdom, which possessed an organised police, with staffs, helmets and all complete, and was consequently very little troubled with marauders of any description. It was very unlikely that the Prince had run away of his own accord: such an idea was at once negatived by the consideration of his tender age, his lively and affectionate disposition, and the entire want of probable motive on his part for any such a proceeding.

All, therefore, was enveloped in mystery, and the more his parents thought over the affair the more completely puzzled did they become. The soldier and the nursery-maid were closely cross-questioned as to the affair, and both persistently adhered to the same story. The Prince, they said, had been playing about near them when they first sat down, and had never asked them to walk on, or expressed the slightest annoyance at their remaining where they were. They owned, with sincere penitence, that they had been grossly careless in not keeping watch over the precious child, and the soldier readily admitted that he had no business to have been in the forest at all. But they both vowed and declared that they would have given their lives for Prince Merry, and were utterly and completely surprised and horrified at his disappearance, of which they could give no account whatever.

The King, when he thought quietly and soberly over such matters, was not inclined to be severe upon offenders generally, and retracted the sentence which, in the first moments of his wrath, he had passed upon these two individuals. As, however, it was impossible to overlook the matter altogether, he directed that a

large and strong cage should be made, of sufficient size to contain them both, and in this he ordered the unhappy pair to be confined, telling them that, as they were so fond of each other's society, they should enjoy it at all events for some time to come, and should be kept in their cage until Prince Merry should be found again. After this, the King summoned his ministers, and took counsel with them as to the best course to be adopted in order to discover, if possible, what had become of the heir to the throne. Many different opinions were given, some of which had the appearance of wisdom about them, whilst others were absurd and beneath contempt. All, however, were agreed that advertisements should be inserted in all the newspapers of that and the adjoining kingdoms, and large rewards offered for the restoration of the lost Prince.

The task of drawing up the advertisement fell to the Newsmonger General, a high officer of state whose duty it was to watch over all the publications of the day, and exercise a general supervision over the newspaper press, which was never allowed to write nonsense or to say anything abusive about anybody. This great functionary found no difficulty in drawing up an advertisement to the following effect:

Lost, stolen, or strayed,
As in Forest he played,
Prince Mirabel, often called 'Merry.'
He was perfectly made,
His parents obeyed,
And was gentle and tractable, very:
A lively lad, too,
On his arm a mark blue,

And a diamond-set girdle around him,
Gold pieces not few
Shall be given to you
Who bring the Prince here, when you've found him!

This advertisement was forthwith inserted in all the newspapers, and every means was taken to give publicity to the astounding circumstances of the case. Not content with the newspapers, huge advertisements were stuck up at all the principal railway stations, on the sides of all blank walls (especially those upon which 'Stick no bills' had been prominently affixed by the owners) and in every situation where people were accustomed to congregate. All this, however, produced not the slightest effect. No tidings whatever were heard of the young Prince, and no answers were given to the advertisements, except such as turned out on enquiry to have been sent by rogues and swindlers who wanted to make a good thing of it, and were in several instances detected and hung for their pains.

The worst of it was, in the opinion of the Royal family, that in spite of the misfortune which had befallen their illustrious house, everything went on just the same in the rest of the kingdom. No general blight fell upon everybody and everything, but the people persevered in prospering most provokingly, the harvests were just as good, trade and commerce flourished equally well, men bought and sold, married and reared families, and in every respect conducted their business and passed their lives just as comfortably as if the young Prince had never been lost at all. That common people should be happy when Royalty

suffered was something totally opposed to those first principles which taught the monarchs and great people of those days that upon them and their happiness the whole world hinged and depended, and there might well have been Kings who would have resented such an unnatural condition of things, and have turned their wrath upon those who dared thus to thrive during their sorrow. But, being a philosopher, this worthy Prince only saw in the circumstances of his country another proof of the heartlessness and inferiority of the common herd, who had not indeed the grace to suffer with their ruler, but were on that account rather to be pitied and despised than punished. With great magnanimity, therefore, he endured the prosperity of his people, and visited upon them the callous indifference to his sorrow which they showed in this practical manner, in no other way than by the imposition of a few more taxes, in order to defray the expenses consequent upon the continued inquiries after the lost Prince.

Things went on in this manner for some time; year after year slipped away, no more children were born to the Royal couple, and it seemed as if the kingdom would pass, after their decease, into the possession of their two daughters, of whom it is now high time to make mention.

Malvina and Pettina were two beautiful Princesses, though their style was somewhat different. Malvina was a queenly creature; tall, but not too tall, with raven hair, finely-cut features, and dark eyes that flashed brightly as lightning on a summer's eve. Her temper was perhaps just a little imperious, but then

she seemed born to command, and there was no reason to doubt the goodness of her heart. Her younger sister, however, was entirely different. She was one of those creatures whom you could not better describe than as a little fairy. Somewhat below the average height of women, her figure was the most graceful you can imagine, her limbs exquisitely moulded, her light tresses had a special beauty of their own, and if her features were not regularly handsome, there was an expression of happiness and heart-cheerfulness in them which made her face lovely to look upon, and her whole being seemed to sparkle like the morning light of a summer day. Pettina was as much loved as Malvina was admired; and the King and Queen might well be, as indeed they were, proud of their charming daughters, though even in the pleasure thus afforded them they could never forget the lost hope of their ancient house.

At the time of which I write the two Princesses had reached the respective ages of eighteen and seventeen, and were daily growing more beautiful and accomplished. As may well be believed, no pains had been spared upon their education. They played excellently well upon several musical instruments, their singing was something quite out of the common way, they spoke modern languages with a facility and fluency which was really wonderful, and in their knowledge of history, geography, and other branches of education their proficiency was far above the average.

It is not surprising that under these circumstances the suitors for the hands of the two Princesses should

have been neither few nor far between. Perhaps the number may have been increased by the knowledge of the great probability that the whole kingdom would eventually come to one or both of the sisters, but, be this as it may, there was certainly no lack of eligible persons who desired to form a matrimonial alliance with one or other of the pair.

The powerful King of the Islands, where was the finest and most numerous breed of white horses ever known, had long regarded Malvina with loving eyes; the Prince of the River Country, whose immense income was entirely derived from the swans which he preserved by thousands, had cast tender looks upon Pettina; whilst the mighty Giant Pattle-perry, who lived in the Coal Country, had been heard to declare that either of the damsels was more precious than coal, which was saying a great deal and plainly showed his appreciation of their worth. The King and Queen, however, had no desire to part with their children, and no wish for any marriage save one of affection. The girls themselves were very happy at home, and for some time all the rumours of offers to be made by the various potentates I have mentioned never came to anything more than vague reports.

Nine years had elapsed since the disappearance of Prince Merry, and his parents had at last abandoned all hopes of his recovery, and bowed in sorrowful submission to the terrible affliction which had befallen them. Whilst the King devoted himself with increased energy to public affairs, and gave all his spare moments to literature; the Queen, finding her household occupations insufficient for her amusement,

betook herself to the healthy and pleasant pursuit of gardening. As it might well be in the case of a palace belonging to so great a monarch, the gardens attached to the royal residence were very spacious, and no expense was spared to bring them to the greatest perfection. Numerous gardeners were employed, some whose special duty it was to look after the acres of glass under which the choicest fruit was reared for the royal table, others who devoted their attention exclusively to flowers, a third body to whom vegetables were the sole care, and a staff of labourers, whose whole occupation consisted in keeping the lawns well mown and smooth, in sweeping dead leaves from the paths, and in raking and keeping in proper order the miles of gravel walks for which the royal gardens were so famous.

In these gardens and the adjoining shrubberies the Queen passed a great part of her time, sometimes alone, and not unfrequently accompanied by one or other of her daughters. One very lovely evening Her Majesty had strolled to the further extremity of the garden, and taken her seat upon a rustic bench which she had long ago caused to be placed under an ancient oak close to the forest. She was quite alone; and as she sat listening to the many soothing sounds which filled the air, her melancholy became quite irrepressible, and the tears ran fast down her cheeks as she thought of her past happiness and present sorrow. The voice of Nature seemed to speak of peace and joy and love. The tender woodpigeon gently coo'd her 'good-night' to her faithful mate, the clear and melodious note of the nightingale fell with pleasant cadence upon the

listener's ears, the bees were humming their drowsy farewell to the sun, the robin chanted his evening hymn, the timid bats had begun to flutter out to meet the approaching twilight, and the busy life of day was just giving place to the quiet sleep of night. Touched to the heart by the influence of the hour, the Royal lady continued to weep softly for some moments, and then, clasping her hands together with fervour, she exclaimed aloud—

'Everything seems happy and peaceful—I alone am wretched—I alone have no joy in life, for the love of my heart was for my boy, and he has been taken from me. Oh! will he never, never, come back? Shall I never see him again?'.

As she spoke, the Queen threw a supplicating glance heavenwards, and would probably have continued to say more in the same strain, had not her last question been suddenly answered in a most unexpected manner.

'Why not?' exclaimed a voice in a short, sharp tone, which of itself, coming from an invisible speaker, would have been startling enough, but, considering the particular time and place at which it was heard, was alarming in a remarkable degree.

The Queen started violently, and looked right, left, and behind the tree, without seeing anything at all. Then it struck her to look straight in front of her by way of a change, and immediately that she did so she perceived the person from whom the voice had proceeded. It was a man so small that you might fairly have called him a dwarf without being accused of misrepresentation. He could not have been four

feet high, or anything near it, and although he held himself as upright as possible, nobody could have complimented him upon his height, except those who, for reasons of their own, prefer short men to tall. Upon his head he had a small close-fitting velvet cap, his coat was of a bright green with enormous brown buttons, upon which were carved the figures of various woodland animals; similar buttons also adorned his buff waistcoat, whilst his lower members were incased in thick cord breeches, with leather gaiters overtopping highly polished boots. In his hand he held a spud nearly as tall as himself, and this he swung to and fro as he sat upon the large root of a tree in the midst of some ornamental rockwork exactly opposite the bench upon which Her Majesty was sitting.

As soon as this strange individual perceived that the Queen had seen him and fixed her eyes upon him with great surprise, he calmly nodded at her, and again repeated the words, 'Why not?' after which he apparently waited for an answer to his question.

This, however, it was scarcely possible for the Queen to give: the only reason 'why' she feared she would never see her son again was that he was most likely dead or carried to some remote region of the earth, or else he would surely have been heard of before nine years had expired since his first disappearance. But to the good mother's heart hope was immediately conveyed by the words of the little man, and not only could she give no reason why she should not see her son again, but the probability of her doing so instantly suggested itself to her mind, and a thrill of joy darted at once to her very soul.

She sprang from her seat hastily, and throwing herself upon her knees in front of the little gentleman, clasped her hands again, and exclaimed in a tone of piteous entreaty—

'Oh sir, *can* you tell me anything of my lost one—yours are the first words of comfort I have heard for many a long day: give me, oh give me my boy, and I will bless you for ever!'

'Do you like your turkeys roast or boiled?' calmly enquired the individual thus addressed, which question appeared so ill-timed and extraordinary to the Queen that she was utterly confused for the moment. 'Because,' continued the speaker, 'there are two opinions upon that point, as upon everything else. Roast turkey is excellent when hot, but the bird is so much better cold when it has been boiled, that I can never quite agree with those who say that "a turkey boiled is a turkey spoiled."'

By this time the Queen had somewhat recovered her equanimity, and again earnestly accosted the dwarf, for so indeed he might be called.

'Sir, sir,' she cried, 'I beseech you trifle not with a mother's feelings. If you know anything of my lost darling, tell me; by all you hold dear, I adjure you to tell me at once.'

'There are three things,' gravely replied the little man, 'which through life, you will do well to avoid. Never fly into a passion—never sit long with wet feet, and do not take a hedgehog in your hands without gloves.'

At this disrespectful and trying reply to her entreaty, the Queen began to wax wroth, and rising

hastily to her feet, she exclaimed in an indignant tone, 'Sir, I know not who or what you are, but no one with the feelings of a gentleman would treat a lady thus, and no one who was worthy of the name of man would thus deal with an unhappy mother,' and so saying, she burst into tears again.

'Suet pudding,' calmly observed the Dwarf, 'is improved by treacle; game should always be dressed with its own gravy; and you will do well to have the chill taken off your claret before drinking it.'

The Queen now became more angry than ever. 'What do you mean?' she cried in louder tones. 'What right have you to come and talk nonsense here in such a heartless manner?' What is your name, and wherefore do you come without leave or licence into these gardens?'

As Her Majesty spoke, she took a step forward towards the rockwork, as if determined to bring the intruder to account forthwith. But the Dwarf now rose from his seat, and bowed to the Royal lady with the utmost gravity. 'Madam,' he said, in a voice which was quite deferential in its tone, 'I am really grieved to have been the cause of so much excitement; I might almost say irritation, in your Majesty. My name is Rindelgrover; my abode is in the forest; my profession that of a dwarf and philosopher; and my intentions are of the very best description.'

'But, sir,' rejoined the Queen, scarcely mollified by the statement to which she had just listened, 'if this be so, why pretend to have news of my beloved son, and then answer my earnest inquiries with irrelevant and impertinent remarks?'

The little man shrugged his shoulders. 'Boys will be boys,' said he, 'and dwarfs will be dwarfs, to the end of their days, and it is not of the slightest use to expect them to be anything else. It is not our habit to answer questions directly they are asked, if we do so at all. A few wise sayings or remarks, thrown in in an interjaculatory manner, tend to compose the mind and clear the way for a better reply than one might give upon the spur of the moment. Since, however, you object to my method of proceeding, I will annoy you no more. In fact, all I came here to say was that I wish to be your friend. The charms of your two daughters have quite vanquished me. Pettina is a duck and Malvina is a darling. To restore to them a brother and to you a son seems to me to be something which would entitle me to the gratitude of you all. *Now* am I talking nonsense?'

'Oh, sir!' tearfully exclaimed the Queen: 'If you are not deceiving me with false hopes, you will indeed prove yourself to be my best of friends. But say, oh say, what I am to do to get back my lost darling?'

'Bread-and-butter with fresh water-cresses makes a wholesome and delicious meal,' replied the Dwarf, and then with a violent effort breaking himself off from his accustomed mode of answering questions, thus continued: 'I beg your pardon, madam, for this short digression; I will endeavour to help you by every means in my power, and if I don't succeed in doing so, call me Macklethorpe, instead of Rindelgrover.'

'I have no intention of calling you anything so ridiculous,' returned the Queen; 'nor indeed do I wish

to call you anything at all, if you will only cause the realisation of the hopes to which you have given birth.'

'I see,' replied the little man, 'that I must explain myself. Macklethorpe is the Dwarf of the Meadows —a poor, dandelion-crowned fool, with whom I am not on terms, for reasons which I need not now explain. *I* am the Dwarf of the Forest, and a vastly superior being, as you may suppose from what you see. I would tell you all I know about your son with pleasure, if I were not bound by an oath of fearful import not to do so. But if you want to know, and to recover your lost boy, there is only one thing to be done. Let your two daughters eat an acorn apiece from off the tree under which you have been sitting for three nights, just before they let down their back hair on going to bed. On the next morning they will understand the language of the forest creatures. Then let them walk boldly into the forest without any attendants, and you will see what you will see!'

With these words, the Dwarf made another low bow to the Queen, and then walking up to the gate which opened into the forest, passed through it, and disappeared in the most natural manner possible.

The Queen remained plunged in deep thought. What did it all mean? Could she trust to this little gentleman, who called himself 'Rindelgrover'? Would it be safe for her daughters to go alone into the forest? She pondered over the matter for some little time in great doubt as to what it would be best to do; and at last resolved that she would go and consult the King, for in those days wives were not above

consulting their husbands, and husbands their wives, even upon matters of the greatest importance.

She found His Majesty in the library, where he was deeply engaged in writing an essay upon 'Poverty, its causes and remedies,' which he was quite justified in doing, as he probably knew less upon the subject than any other man in his kingdom, which, as lookers-on see the best of the game, was perhaps the best qualification for giving an opinion upon it.

The King readily left his employment when informed of the Queen's errand, and only regretted that he had not been with her during the interesting interview which had just taken place. He was not long in deciding that his daughters had far better do as the Dwarf had directed. He could not believe, he said, that so great a misfortune would be permitted to fall upon a crowned head as that he should lose *all* his children, and he felt the greatest hope that some good might be in store for their house from the visit of the Dwarf.

The Queen entirely agreed in this view of the case; and upon the matter being stated to the persons principally concerned, the two Princesses vied with each other in the readiness with which they declared that they would run far greater risks than those entailed by a walk in the forest if they could only be the means of recovering their dear brother, and restoring peace and happiness to their beloved parents. The King, however, being an eminently just man, and unwilling to take advantage of the first ebullition of sisterly affection, desired the young ladies to go to bed and think over the matter before finally deciding,

since it must be of their own free will that they encountered the dangers which might possibly be before them. Like dutiful children they quickly obeyed, especially as it was getting very late, and was already beyond their usual bed-time.

Next morning, however, found them exactly in the same frame of mind, determined to face anything for the sake of the object in view. Accordingly, in the course of the day, six acorns were carefully gathered from the old oak, and the sisters, not without sundry wry faces, each ate one before going to bed. This process they repeated upon the second and third days, and the following morning prepared to fulfil their appointed task.

As no particular time had been fixed by the worthy Rindelgrover for their excursion, the Queen kept her daughters with her until after luncheon, when, having been duly fortified by cutlets, sweetbreads, and light claret, the Princesses sallied forth, walked down the garden, one on each side of their mother, and having reached the great oak under which the latter had been sitting upon the occasion of the eventful visit of the Dwarf, bade the Queen a tender farewell, and boldly entered the forest.

The afternoon was warm, but the luxuriant foliage of the large trees kept off the sun, and rendered the walk rather pleasant than otherwise to the Princesses. They walked for some distance without any adventure whatever. All was silent; the birds seemed disinclined to sing—the animals were doubtless couching in the fern and shady places—there was scarcely a breath of air stirring, and

everything was as quiet as can be imagined. After a time, the two sisters began to get tired of walking on, constantly expecting something to happen which never *did* happen, and thought that, under the circumstances, they might as well sit down.

A little stream ran through the forest, and upon its banks they were standing when they came to this determination. It was a very little stream, such as one could jump across without much difficulty; but its clear waters gurgled on, for all it was so little, with a cheerful sound, now and then quite shallow, as they passed over some bed of sand or gravel which rose near to the surface of the stream, and anon quite respectably deep, giving room for trout to lurk in deep holes under the banks and for shoals of smaller fish to dart about and disport themselves in the water. Here the Princesses took their seats upon the bank, and began to watch the stream and listen to its pleasant rippling sound.

They had not sat there long before a kingfisher came darting by them like a flash of lightning, and uttered a short sharp cry as for one instant he displayed his gaudy colours before their eyes, and then sped away with a swiftness which it defied their gaze to follow. The two sisters looked at each other with surprise, for, by the miraculous power which they had derived from their acorns, they heard with perfect distinctness, and understood into the bargain, the observation which the bird had made as he flew past them. To ordinary mortals it would have seemed but an unmeaning sound, but to them it was far otherwise, and they knew that the kingfisher had said,

'Hurrah! now there's a chance for the poor Prince! Well done, Rindelgrover!'

The Princesses looked at each other, as I have said, with surprise not unmixed with awe; and these feelings were rather increased than diminished, when almost immediately afterwards they heard two wood-pigeons cooing to each other in conjugal and agreeable manner, and comprehended with perfect ease the sum and substance of their conversation.

'These are good girls!' said the one. 'Well done, Rindelgrover!'

'That they are indeed,' returned the other bird. 'Loving sisters and dutiful daughters. They are sure to succeed, and what is more, they will thoroughly deserve to do so. Well done, Rindelgrover!'

At these words hope at once filled the hearts of the Princesses; but they had not time to exchange ideas upon the subject before a robin struck up his song in a neighbouring bush, and spoke to the following effect:

'How long has been the time since the poor little Prince has been kept from his home and all who love him! Not quite so, however, for we birds and woodland animals have ever loved him, and would have set him free long ago if we could have done so. But the power was not ours, and we could only wait and hope. Still, now these two charming Princesses have come, doubtless all will soon be well, and the Prince will be restored to his own again. Well done, Rindelgrover!'

'Well!' cried Malvina, now fairly astonished and puzzled at what she had just heard, 'of all the strange

things that ever have happened certainly this is the strangest. The birds all seem to say the same thing, but yet none of them seem to think it necessary to tell us what to do in order to obtain the success which they foretell for us.'

'Suppose we ask one of them?' suggested Pettina, who was not without natural acuteness, and being young and innocent, had an idea that the best way to obtain information was to ask questions of those who possessed it.

Malvina raised no objection to this view of the case, and accordingly they both looked round, and presently perceived a woodpecker crawling quietly up a tree and preparing himself for a little tapping amusement.

'Mr. Woodpecker,' said Malvina in a courteous and reassuring tone,—'Mr. Woodpecker, could you, would you tell us how we ought to proceed so that we may get back our lost brother?'

'*I* don't know everything,' sharply returned the bird thus addressed. 'I know something about it, but not enough; ask the squirrels? It's a good job you have come, though. Well done, Rindelgrover!' and so saying, he resumed his tapping with much enthusiasm.

At this moment Pettina observed a hare sitting on the opposite bank of the stream, nibbling the young grass and enjoying itself after the innocent fashion of such animals. 'Puss,' cried the Princess immediately, 'please tell us how we can find our brother, and what we ought to do next?'

The hare started at the voice, as if she had not

previously observed the speaker. 'Guns and dogs!' she cried, 'how you *did* startle me! I would willingly tell you all I know, for you look so kind that I am quite grieved that you should be in sorrow. But you must know that I really can say no more about it, for in this forest we leave all such matters entirely to the squirrels. You had better ask *them*, I should think. Well done, Rindelgrover!' and having thus spoken, the hare quietly returned to her occupation of grass-nibbling, and took no further notice of the Princesses.

The latter now began to think that the squirrels were evidently the people to be sought, and they therefore determined to wander along the banks of the stream in hopes of encountering some of these little animals. Nor had they far to go before their object was accomplished. Not many yards from the spot where they had been seated, they perceived two squirrels chasing each other round and round a tree, climbing over its branches, jumping from place to place, and having a regular good game of hunt-the-squirrel, or hide and seek, or by whatever name the squirrels call it when they are at home. The Princesses approached as near as they thought they might venture to do without giving offence to the graceful little animals; and then Malvina addressed them in the following words:

'Kind squirrels, would you be so *very* good as to inform us where our dear brother, Prince Merry, is; and what we are to do in order to get him back again?'

As she spoke, the squirrels approached near to each other, and sat sedately, about a foot apart, on a

tolerably low branch of a mighty oak which stood near. When Malvina had ceased speaking, they looked at her, then at Pettina, and then at each other, and then began to sing the following extraordinary words:—

I.

Two sisters went walking out into the wood;
Out into the wood when the sun was high,
Their brother they wanted to find if they could,
And their mother stayed back with a tear in her eye!
For girls must seek when their brothers are lost,
And the longer time passes, the greater the cost,
And the furnace fires are roaring!

II.

The Prince he was playing all under the trees,
All under the trees with his nice new ball,
He wandered away till at last by degrees
No more could he hear his poor nurse's call.
So girls must seek when their brothers are lost,
And the longer time passes the greater the cost,
And the furnace fires are roaring!

III.

The Giant has seized the young Prince in his arms,
His struggles and cries they are all in vain,
In the Country of Coal there are wiles and charms,
And ne'er may Prince Merry come home again!
Yet if girls *do* seek when their brothers are lost,
Dear to the Giant his prize may cost,
And the furnace fires stop roaring!

Having concluded their song, the squirrels immediately exclaimed as if with one voice, 'Well done, Rindelgrover!' and began their game again as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened out of the common way.

The sisters were full of wonder at the words of the song which they had just heard. Their thoughts were of course directly pointed to the Giant Pattleperry, who, as has been already mentioned, had expressed himself in terms which had led them to believe that he might appear at Court as a suitor for the hand of one or other of them. Was he, then, the captor of their dear brother, and the cause of all the sorrow which had so long overshadowed their family? Then the thought passed quickly through their brains that their invitation to walk in the forest might be a trick of this very Giant, who, according to the squirrels, had there entrapped their brother. Still, if this were the case, what had the Dwarf to do with it, and why should all the animals conclude their observations with a panegyric upon that small individual? The whole affair was quite incomprehensible to the two sisters; and they both felt that it would never do to leave the squirrels without further information upon a subject so important to themselves and their family. Therefore, without further delay they proceeded to make another appeal to the little animals, who by this time were merrily pursuing one another round and round their favourite tree, at a considerable height from the ground.

'Dear little squirrels!' cried Malvina. 'You darling little pets!' exclaimed Pettina, and having thus attracted the attention of the small creatures, who were probably unused to such endearing epithets, both the young ladies continued, in one and the same instant:

'Do tell us what we ought to do! If you *would*

but tell us! We quite trust you, but we really don't know what to do next.'

With these words they gazed upwards with such a beseeching air that mortal squirrel could hardly have resisted them. The squirrels, being but mortal, were quite unable to do so; and both ran down the tree again without a moment's hesitation, and seating themselves upon the same branch from which they had previously addressed the sisters, began to sing as follows:—

Follow the stream till you come to a mound
Where pigs and wild strawberries greatly abound:
'Tis there you will find your best friend in the wood,
Who hates what is evil and follows the good.
Call him once; call him twice; by the name you have heard,
And add to that name just one magical word:
'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural'—remember it well!
For Dwarfs—aye, and Giants, must bow to the spell.
Now, plague us no more with your 'ifs' and your 'buts,
For squirrels hate trouble as much as bad nuts,
The one hurts the teeth, and the other the heart,
So list to our counsel, and haste to depart!

'Well done, Rindelgrover!'—and with these words the squirrels jumped up again, and recommenced their gambols as if nobody was there and no business but their own had to be thought of.

The sisters eagerly listened to every word which had fallen from the little animals; and having now received clear and definite instructions, resolved to follow them without delay. Rising from their seats upon the bank, they followed the course of the little stream, earnestly looking out for the place which the squirrels had indicated to them as the abode of their

'best friend in the wood,' whom they naturally supposed to be the Dwarf who had invited them thither.

For some time they saw nothing at all like the place which had been described to them: the stream wound its way through the forest like a sensible stream would naturally do, running along through the prettiest places, never going up hill, and winding to and fro as if it was in no hurry to get out of the wood, but wished to see as much of it as it could before it came out again into the hot sun and open country. At last, when they were nearly tired of walking along by its side, listening to the casual remarks of various birds and beasts, which all ended in the same laudatory observation upon the mighty Rindelgrover, a sudden turn of the stream brought before them a new and unusual scene.

The ground sloped upward upon one side of the rivulet, forming that which might fairly be called a mound, which was perfectly covered with a bed of wild strawberries. There was no mistake about it, for the fruit was there in profusion, and so tempting did it look that the sisters, being somewhat thirsty after their walk, would have been inclined to make closer acquaintance with the red berries at once, had not there been other things to observe at the same time. A number of pigs were feeding all round the mound, grubbing away here and there, but none of them venturing to touch the strawberries. They were pigs of various sorts and sizes, dark and light, big and little, but all seemed to be as happy and contented as if hams, bacon, pickled pork, and pigs' feet and ears had never been thought of by hungry mortals. Still,

as nothing was to be seen but pigs and strawberries, the Princesses felt that they must take action according to the advice of the squirrels, if they wished to see that best of friends who was said to have his abode in the place before them. Accordingly, they approached the mound and stood upon the edge of the strawberry bed, the pigs taking no notice whatever of them, and not appearing in the slightest degree disturbed by their presence. Then Malvina raised her voice and pronounced in a clear, firm tone the word 'Rindelgrover!' Pettina followed her sister's example; and the words were scarcely out of their mouths before a chorus of grunts arose around them, every pig in the place loudly exclaiming in his native tongue, 'Well done, Rindelgrover!' Once more the sisters spoke aloud the name of him whom they had been taught to consider their best friend in the wood, and then both speaking at once, and not without some little difficulty, they pronounced the magic word of words, 'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural.'

The effect was instantaneous. From a thicket at no great distance a pig of larger than ordinary size suddenly made his appearance. Not, however, a common pig undistinguishable from the rest of the herd, but a pig adorned with saddle and bridle and all the trappings of a horse. He held his head proudly and bore himself like a pig of importance as he cantered downwards to the stream; and so indeed he well might do, for he bore a rider whom, from the description given by their mother, the Princesses instantly recognised as the Dwarf Rindelgrover. Upright he sat upon his porcine steed, with the

golden tassel of his velvet cap streaming in the air as he rode down towards the astonished sisters, before whom he reined in his pig, and stood at a short distance, bowing gracefully to his visitors. A general grunt of 'Well done, Rindelgrover!' burst from the surrounding swine upon the appearance of this evidently powerful individual, but he appeared to object to any such demonstration. Rising in his stirrups, he waved his hand in a careless manner as if to forbid further observations of a similar character, and then bowed again to the Princesses, apparently awaiting their pleasure.

'Oh, sir!' exclaimed Malvina, 'can you—will you—help us to get back our brother?'

'Devonshire cream is an excellent thing for breakfast, especially with strawberries,' replied the Dwarf, with a smile.

Pettinà, who was as clever as beautiful, at once remembered her mother's account of the behaviour of Rindelgrover upon their first meeting, and the objection which he had to questions. She therefore took her part in the conversation in the following manner. Smiling back pleasantly upon the little gentleman, she said in her sweetest tone:

'How nice it is to have friends in the forest to help one when one wants anything! How happy we should be if we knew all about our brother's disappearance and what to do in order to get him back again!' and here, nudging her sister, who readily understood her meaning, they both exclaimed at one and the same moment: 'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural!'

The Dwarf's face lighted up with unmistakeable

joy: 'Well done, young lady,' he cried; 'you have spoken just as you ought to have spoken, and although your dear sister fell into the error of asking a question, instead of calmly stating her wishes, the fault is one of a trifling nature, and shall at once be overlooked. You have now only to listen to me, which I beg you to do with great attention. The Giant Pattle-perry is the sole cause of all the misery which you and your parents have endured for the last nine years. This fellow is one of the worst giants the world ever saw, which is saying a great deal, for those overgrown rascals are a bad lot altogether. He inhabits the Coal Country which lies beyond this forest, and is a terrible tyrant to his unfortunate people, whom he compels to work in his coal-pits, which of course bring him in a large revenue. As the inhabitants of his country are insufficient to supply him with all the workmen he requires, he has long been in the habit of kidnapping anybody and everybody he could, and being well versed in the arts of magic, has frequently resorted to the most unfair measures in order to carry out his ends. He has, properly speaking, no power in this forest, except that, being bigger than I am, I cannot drive him out of it if he chooses to walk in it. This he does not often do, though oftener than I could wish, and many a roast leg of pork has graced his table which ought now to be a living limb of one of my faithful pigs. The Giant knows, however, that two can play at magic as well as one, and has not lately troubled me. But nine years ago he was here and approached nearer to your father's pala[illegible] had ever done

before. 'He saw your brother playing, and whether from any old grudge against your family, or from a naturally evil disposition, determined to kidnap him, and did so accordingly, disguising himself as a puppy until he had drawn the child some distance in pursuit of him, and then suddenly resuming his own form, and carrying off the astonished little fellow under his arm. It was all the worse of him, because the poor young Prince was too small to be of any use to him in his coal-pits. Nor, indeed, am I certain that he has ever been employed there. All I *do* know is that, like many others, he is a captive in the Giant's kingdom, which can be entered with comparative ease, but to leave which requires much care and some little magical knowledge on the part of those who wish to do so. You, my dear young ladies, will have to seek your brother in that kingdom.'

The Princesses gave a start and a shudder at these words, but the Dwarf continued with a smile:

'There is no need to be afraid. You have powerful friends, and will, with proper attention to the directions given you, overcome all the difficulties before you. The King of the Islands and the Prince of the River Country are my friends, and will, I know, aid us, if necessary, with their full power. But, in the first instance at least, cunning is more requisite than strength. Pattle-perry himself is no match for many others in magic. There is, however, a person called Macklethorpe whom we have to fear more than the Giant, whom he advises and aids. This fellow is, like myself, of a respectable size, and not an overgrown bulk of flesh like Pattle-perry, but this makes

him all the more dangerous. Remember, however, the mystic word of power, which, pronounced by mortal mouth under certain conditions, cannot be resisted by Dwarf or Giant.'

'And what are the conditions?' hastily asked both the sisters in one breath.

'It is most desirable to have a parasol if you go out in the sun upon a hot day,' rejoined the Dwarf. 'What! both of you asking questions again? Pray get out of this bad habit at once, or we shall never get on together. I was about to say that this word has only its full magic power when pronounced by persons of innocent hearts, who have not reached the age of twenty, who never use bad language, speak ill of their neighbours behind their backs, or eat fish with their knives. As you two young ladies combine all that is necessary for the effective pronunciation of the word, it will have great power in the mouth of either of you, and as I am about to devote myself to your service, you will perhaps be good enough to recollect that if I should get into any trouble with other persons who may employ magic arts as well as I do, you may be of the greatest service to me as well as to yourselves by the judicious use of the word in question.'

Rindelgrover now came to a conclusion, and the sisters burned with curiosity to know several things more, which, however, they dared not ask, after his repeated statement of his objection to questions. That which puzzled them most was why, since the worthy Dwarf seemed to have known the circumstances attending the abduction of their brother for so long, he had waited for nine years before speaking, when he might

at once have somewhat relieved the anxiety of their parents. Then, why should he *now* interfere at all, and run the risk of bringing Pattle-perry's vengeance upon his own devoted head? They pondered deeply upon these things, but deemed it best to remain silent under the circumstances. And indeed I think they were right, for it is impossible for us mortals to know the ways of dwarfs, giants, and fairies, or to attempt to fathom the motives by which such creatures are actuated. So the sisters asked nothing more and waited patiently until their little friend spoke again, which he presently did.

'Now,' said he, 'young ladies, we have a journey to go and had better start at once. First, however, let me recommend you to eat some of these strawberries, which you will find singularly refreshing.'

Nothing loth, the sisters consented to this proposal, and found themselves immensely strengthened by the fruit, which had not only a delicious taste but all the qualities and virtues of a tonic without any of its bitterness.

'Now then,' rejoined Rindelgrover, 'we must be off, and as the distance is long, I hope you will consent to ride.'

The girls looked round, and perceived to their surprise two pigs standing near, with side-saddles on, all ready for their reception. They looked at each other half doubtfully, and greatly inclined to laugh, but wisely remembering how serious was the business in which they were engaged, they preserved their gravity, mounted their respective pigs, and prepared to follow their leader. The pigs were of good size,

and although their trot was rather rough, the Princesses found their canter quite tolerable, and in any case, as they had come some distance, this kind of conveyance was just then far more agreeable than walking. The Dwarf rode between them for some way, discoursing in an ordinary manner about things and people, and making himself as agreeable as he could to his companions.

Presently the forest got thicker and they had to ride in single file, and then again the trees became fewer in number, the bushes and underwood less thick, and it was evident that they were approaching the outskirts of the forest. Their way now lay up rising ground, or in fact the side of a mountain, upon which the trees became still fewer, and masses of rock lay around the travellers, gradually taking the place of the vegetation they were leaving behind them. The journey was no longer so pleasant, but as it was late in the afternoon and the sun had lost its power, the sisters continued to travel without inconvenience. Suddenly the Dwarf stopped.

'Now,' said he, 'my dear young ladies, we are very near the boundary which divides us from the Giant's kingdom, which you will presently see. Before entering it, however, it is desirable to let the sun set, which he will very shortly do. You must not be surprised or alarmed at any change which you may see take place in my personal appearance. I shall have to disguise myself, probably in more than one shape, as to appear in my natural form would be fatal both to your success and to my own existence. As, however, it is most desirable that *you* should both keep those shapes

which you must allow me to call charming, I would strongly caution you as to your behaviour. Keep the great magic word for use in case of difficulty. Meanwhile, above all things look anybody to whom you speak straight in the face. Nothing disconcerts a knave more than a pair of honest eyes looking into his. Don't look behind you or down upon the ground. Eat and drink what is offered to you, but always remember to say *the word* to yourselves before you do so. Nothing can hurt you then. We must abandon our steeds here: in fact no pig would be safe for a moment in the Giant's country, and their presence would betray us at once. You had better walk straight forward into the country —in fact I will lead the way—and when accosted, say you are come on a visit to Pattle-perry, and demand to be led to his palace. When there, boldly tell him that you have come in search of your brother, lost some nine years ago, and whom you have reason to believe is in his kingdom, and when the matter has been thus fairly started, I can only leave you to the instincts of your own common sense, guided by the advice and instructions which I have had the honour and pleasure of giving you.'

With these words, the worthy Rindelgrover jumped lightly from his steed, and having politely assisted the Princesses to dismount also, turned the three pigs' heads in a homeward direction, and waved his hand towards the forest. The sensible animals needed no further orders, but set off at best speed down the hill with deep grunts of satisfaction. Then the Dwarf pointed out the ledge of a rock upon which the sisters might

sit down, and taking his own seat near them, waited until the sun should have hid his head before the approaching shades of evening.

In a few minutes this was the case, and at the direction of the Dwarf, the three travellers all rose up and ascended the hill once more. They had not far to go, for at the distance of a few yards they were on the top of the ridge of hill, and suddenly came upon the view of the country beyond. The girls started back with astonishment. Their own country was full of meads and dales, woods and streams, plants and flowers, the glorious vegetation of a fertile land. Before their eyes was a country entirely different. Bare and bleak and barren it looked, the trees stunted and rugged, the green fields few and far between. But, ever and anon, bright fires flashing up over the surface of the country showed its character at once to those who knew what they betokened, The wealth of that land was below and not above the surface. It was the country of coal and iron, and the furnace fires spoken of in the squirrels' song were roaring in every direction. Strange and weird and wild it looked to the sisters as they gazed upon it that night, and much they marvelled at the contrast between this country and that which they had left behind.

Glancing round at their companion to make some observation upon the view before them, to their utter astonishment they perceived that he had disappeared. In his place, however, was a black and tan terrier, who ran sniffing about from rock to rock and presently ran up and fawned upon them in the most affectionate manner. They could scarcely believe that this ani-

mal was none other than their diminutive friend, but a few words from him at once showed them that this was the fact, and they became more than ever convinced of his power to help them in the matter which they had so much at heart. So they patted the little fellow with much kindness, called him 'Pincher,' according to his expressed desire, and forthwith entered the Giant's country with this faithful counsellor at their heels.

They had not proceeded far down the side of the hill which they now had to descend, before they perceived several persons standing and sitting about upon the rocks some little way in front of them, apparently awaiting their coming. A whine from Pincher warned them to be on their guard, and they accordingly advanced quietly along the track into which they had come, and which led them directly towards the spot upon which these individuals had placed themselves. As the Princesses drew near, the persons in question all stood in the roadway, and an ill-looking set of fellows they were. Begrimed with coal-dust, unshaven, most of them in their shirt-sleeves, they were not exactly the description of persons whom delicately nurtured princesses would have desired to encounter. Still the sisters resolutely proceeded down the road, and such was the dignity of their appearance and manner, that the men instinctively recoiled before them. However, one of the party, who wore a red sash round his waist and appeared to be in a position of authority, stepped forward in front of the rest and accosted the travellers.

'Hallo! my wenches!' he cried, 'Who be ye

that would enter the territory of the great and glorious Pattle-perry? Show us your passports!'

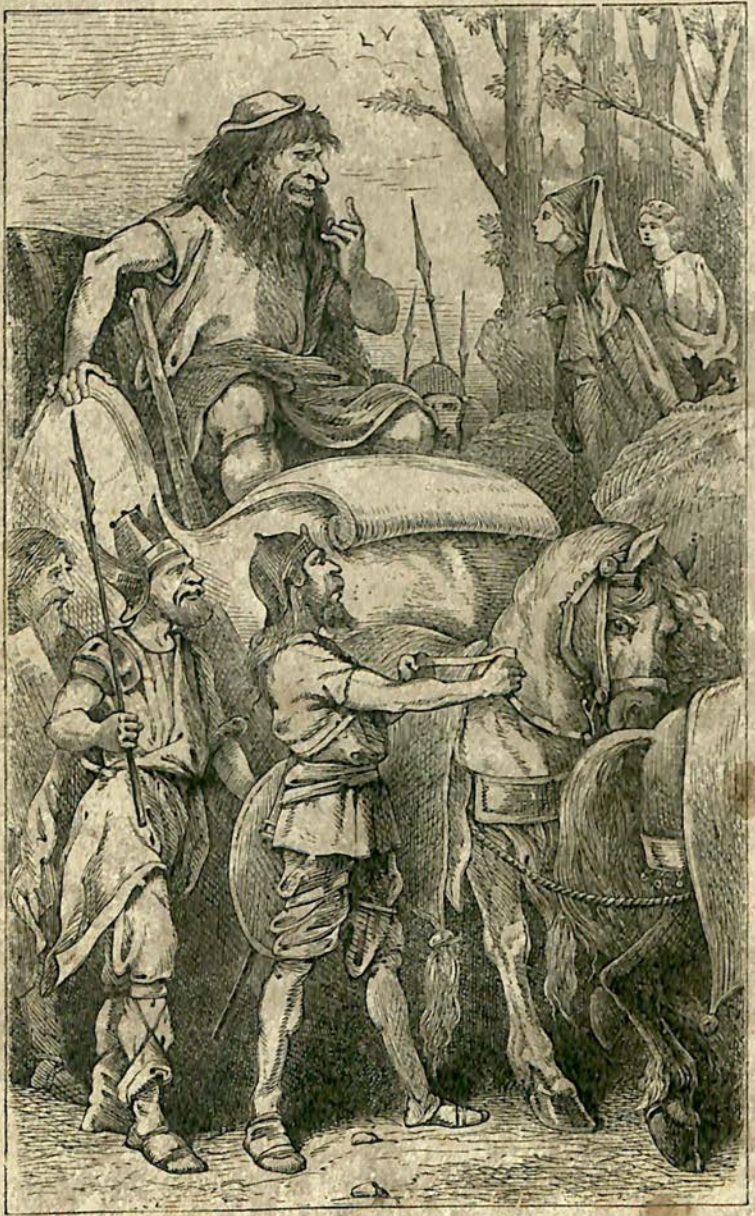
The sisters were sadly confused in this address, for neither Rindelgrover nor anyone else had hinted at passports being necessary in order to enter the country of the Giant, and they certainly had nothing of the kind about them. The ready wit of Pettina, however, came to their aid, and she said, whilst both she and her sister looked the speaker straight in the face,

'What nonsense you are talking! no passports are necessary when we are going to visit our uncle Pattle-perry. Leave the road free, or you shall be reported without fail.'

At these words the man turned as pale as the black dust on his face would permit, and drew back respectfully without another word, as did his companions also. The two Princesses walked calmly through them, followed closely by Pincher, and descended the rest of the hill without interruption. They observed, however, that two of the men followed them at a distance, which caused Malvina some alarm.

'My dear sister,' she remarked, 'you have doubtless done cleverly in getting us over *that* difficulty, but I greatly fear what the result may be. Those who follow us will doubtless report your words at court, and if the Giant hears that we have claimed him as our uncle, he may take advantage of the pretended relationship to detain us in his kingdom for a longer time than we wish to stay.'

'Never mind, my darling sister,' replied Pettina, 'I was obliged to say what came uppermost at the



THE GIANT PATTLE-PERRY.

moment, but I feel sure that we shall get out of the difficulty if it arises. Let us go boldly on, and hope for the best; see how Pincher is showing his teeth in a pleasant manner, and wagging his tail at the same time. I know *he* approves—don't you, Pincher?'

A low whine from the little animal was perfectly understood by the sisters to signify 'Yes—but be cautious,' and they were about to continue their conversation, when it was prevented by another incident. The roll of a drum was heard not far in front; then the shrill blast of a trumpet, and the heavy tread of men marching, betokened the approach of some military body. The sisters paused, in doubt as to what they had better do, and in another moment a cloud of dust showed that the force, whatever it might be, was close at hand. Round the corner of the road there presently turned the drummers, vigorously drumming away as they came on, and then followed a band of mixed instruments, making clamour enough to make the two ladies stop their ears and wish themselves a thousand miles off, inasmuch as the noise was not relieved by tune or harmony. Then, marching four abreast, came a body of men all above the usual height, dressed in white tunics, bare from the knee to the feet, which were shod with thick sandals, and carrying in their hands axes which rested upon their brawny shoulders. They were a rough-looking set of soldiers, but not so rough as the person who followed. In an open car, larger than any car that ever was made before or since, and drawn by eight immense black horses, sat the Giant Pattle-perry: he was at least ten feet high; his head was in proportion as

enormous as his body, which, though stupendous in size, was not unwieldy, and betokened the possession of vast strength. In truth, his arms, which were bare, showed one mass of muscle, and his legs were equally powerful. His black hair clustered in curls over his head, on which he wore a small white 'wide-awake,' which gave him rather a ridiculous appearance; his forehead was low and receding, his eyes large and staring, his nose came forth like a small hill out of his face, and when he smiled, his large mouth disclosed a set of teeth which might well have frightened anybody who did not know that since the days of steam, railways, and vote by ballot, giants have given up being cannibals, and only eat beef, mutton, pork, and such like things, after the fashion of ordinary mortals. Around the car of the Giant ran a number of young men on either side, lightly clad and armed with short spears, whilst behind there followed a motley crowd of horse and foot, among whom dirt and coal-dust were the distinguishing characteristics.

The two Princesses, when they saw this procession advancing towards them, turned aside out of the road and sat down upon a rock at a short distance off; but as soon as the Giant's car came opposite to them, he shouted out in a mighty voice the order to halt.

'What ho!' cried he, when this had been done, 'What ho! whom have we here! damsels wandering alone through our country, and damsels, if we may judge by their appearance, of no mean birth. Draw near, my children, draw near, and tell us whence ye come, and what ye seek in our kingdom?'

As he spoke, the Giant cast a look upon the

sisters which he possibly intended to convey a friendly feeling in the form of a pleasant smile, but which to their eyes presented the appearance of such a frightful grimace that they felt more than half inclined to run away there and then. Knowing, however, that this would be worse than useless, they very wisely restrained their inclination, and, rising from the rock on which they had been seated, approached the Giant in a timid but respectful manner.

'Who are ye, maidens?' asked Pattle-perry with another awful leer which he meant for a reassuring smile.

'We are the daughters of the King of the Flowery Vale,' answered Malvina, looking him straight in the face.

'Fool and dolt and idiot that I was,' immediately cried the Giant, slapping his thigh violently, whilst his face lighted up with a sudden and indescribable joy; 'aye, and ass and pig, and wooden-headed ape into the bargain, not to have known at the first glance that it was the daughters of my good neighbour upon whom I was gazing. No other ladies are so lovely, and none others would I welcome so readily to my country. And what seek ye, fair damsels, that ye have wandered so far from home?'

'We have come,' answered Malvina, still keeping her eyes fast fixed upon the Giant's face—though it was by no means a pleasant object for a girl to gaze upon, especially as he seldom washed and had certainly not shaved that morning—'we have come to seek our brother, who was lost some nine years ago,

and whom we have reason to believe is somewhere or other in your kingdom.'

The Giant's face crimsoned—then turned pale—and then crimsoned again at these words.

'By the memory of my great ancestor Grind-bones!' exclaimed he (referring to a fearful giant of olden time, whose name is well known to all those lovers of Fairy-tales who have read the marvellous adventures of Joe Brown and Puss-Cat-Mew*), 'what wonderful tale is this ye bring! How can I tell where everybody's brother may be who happens to get lost? However, come with me, my chickens, come with me, and we will see all about it. Lucky it is that I made my progress through the land in this direction to-day, else had I missed ye. Come, jump up on to my car!'

As he spoke, the young men on the side of the car nearest the Princesses made way for them to approach. The sisters trembled and hesitated, but it was very plain to them that neither trembling nor hesitation would avail in the slightest degree, and that there was nothing for it but to obey the Giant's orders. As he was alone in his car, there was plenty of room for both the girls by his side, especially as the vehicle was constructed to carry two (supposing they could be found) of the same size as himself. With some little difficulty therefore, and much greater dislike to it, they clambered up into the car, or open chariot, as it might more properly be called, when, at that moment, the eye of the Giant lighted upon the dog Pincher, who was following closely at their heels.

'Ha!' said he sharply and suddenly, 'what dog

* See *Stories for my Children*, by the same Author.

is that? I like not his looks—run me that cur through with a spear, men!'

In another moment his order would have been obeyed, had not Pettina remembered on the instant how much might depend upon Pincher's safety, and how ungrateful it would be, if she did not, without the delay of a second, interpose to save him.

'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural!' she hastily called out, looking at the Giant as she did so; 'that is my favourite dog, sir, and I must beg of you not to have him hurt!'

Several men had already lifted their spears to strike, when the younger Princess uttered the magic word. On the instant every spear was stayed, whilst the Giant put his hand to his forehead as if confused by something, and muttered moodily to himself as he gave the orders to march. Poor Pincher, meanwhile, took the opportunity of following the Princesses into the carriage and jumping into Pettina's lap, where he nestled down and made himself comfortable, though she felt him tremble and his heart beat violently as she patted him. When they had gone a few paces further, they met the two men who had followed the Princesses down the mountain, and the Giant, recognising them as some of his border police, stopped to ask for their report, which they accordingly gave. Pattle-perry grinned from ear to ear when he heard that the Princesses had claimed him for their uncle.

'My charming nieces!' he cried, 'though I knew it not before, I am delighted to own such relations—you shall stay a long time with your old uncle, my pets, that you shall!' and he laughed and chuckled loudly to himself as he drove on.

Presently the road turned to the right, and gradually bore round towards a huge mass of buildings which the sisters perceived in the distance, and which the Giant informed them with a gracious air was the castle which he used as a palace, and in which he would take care that they were provided with apartments suitable to their rank. Not deeming that moment a fitting opportunity for entering further upon the business which had brought them there, the sisters merely bowed their thanks for the proffered hospitality which they would have given their ears to have declined if possible.

The procession advanced nearer and nearer to the palace, and at length reached it. The carriage drove into an enormous court-yard, paved with iron, over which it rumbled up to a vast gate which was thrown open as one of the attendants touched a huge bell which sent forth a deafening peal. The Giant now descended, and assisted the trembling Princesses to do the same, which they accordingly did, Pettina keeping Pincher safe under her arm. Inside the gate was a smaller yard, which the Giant crossed, and opened a door on the further side, opposite which was a flight of handsome stone steps leading into a spacious corridor. From the latter folding doors opened into a magnificent drawing-room, into which the Giant conducted his guests, and prayed them to make themselves at home, whilst he went to give orders for the preparation of the apartments which they would occupy. Just before he left the room, however, he turned to Pettina, and observed somewhat moodily,

'I don't allow dogs in my drawing-room.'

'Oh, sir!' replied she, 'I am sure you will not object to my little pet; I assure you he will hurt no one.'

'But I *do* object,' retorted the Giant with an angry look; 'I object very much, and I do not see why I am to have what I don't like in my own palace.'

As he spoke, he turned back and took a step towards the Princess, as if he were half inclined to take the animal from her. 'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural' gently hummed the maiden as he approached. He stopped suddenly.

'Well,' said he, 'I suppose you must have your own way,' and abruptly left the room.

As soon as ever he was gone, Pincher struggled to be set free, and in a low and whining voice told the sisters that it was evident the Giant knew or suspected that there was something wrong about him.

'Still,' said he, 'as long as he is alone, I fear not, but should others more powerful than he come to visit him whilst we are here, I shall have to "look out for squalls," and you must be prepared to see me assume different shapes, and must take care to help me as I have directed you. Meanwhile, do not lose any time in pressing him upon the matter which you have in hand, otherwise he will continually put you off with excuses, and you may find greater difficulties than ought to be the case.' Having said these words, the little fellow ran under a sofa and hid; shortly after which the Giant re-entered the room.

'Princesses,' he said, 'your apartments are prepared for you; and as you have brought no maid with you, my worthy housekeeper, Dame Skrinklegriggs, will be happy to attend upon you.'

'Sir,' responded Malvina, with a queenly air, 'pray do not disturb your excellent domestic on our account —for excellent I do not doubt she is, albeit her name chance to be none of the most euphonious. We can wait upon each other, and have long been accustomed to dispense with maids, who constantly pull one's hair, talk when they are not wanted to do so, and not unfrequently smell disagreeably of beer. We will beg, therefore, to dispense with your housekeeper's assistance. And before we proceed to the rooms which you have been good enough to provide for us, we would fain enquire of you as to the brother of whom we are in search. What steps do you propose to take in order to make that search effectual?'

The Giant's brow darkened as Malvina spoke these words. 'Quench my philanthropy!' cried he—using an oath now almost out of date, but once greatly in vogue among giants and ogres, and bearing at that time a fearful import,—'you speak like a queen, young lady, and seem to intend to have it all your own way. Scorn the attentions of my housekeeper and require me to proceed to business before dinner! May I never touch pickled pork again—let alone cabbage—if I do any such thing. Let us eat and drink, and talk of business to-morrow morning. Surely that will be time enough!'

'Sir,' replied the elder Princess in the same calm, cold tone, 'we would not be discourteous, neither do we desire to trouble you unnecessarily. Nevertheless, we may not be backward in urging the matter about which we have come hither, neither can we pay

you a long visit, considering that our parents are left sorrowing at home.'

'Not pay me a long visit!' shouted the Giant. 'As sure as my name's Pattle-perry you will find there are two words to *that* bargain. It is easier to get into this kingdom than to get out of it, my dears! Besides,' he added with a grin, 'when nieces come to see their uncle, and openly acknowledge him as such, neither law nor magic can prevent his keeping them until all parties are agreed that the visit should come to an end. So don't think to leave me just yet, my pretty pets!'

The sisters changed colour at these words. They felt it was but too probable that their public recognition of the Giant as their uncle (to which title he had no more claim than the Man in the Moon) might have put them in some measure in his power, and they trembled at the thought. However, it was evidently desirable to put the best face on the matter, and so Pettina, taking up the conversation, said:

'Sir, we have no desire save to do what our duty compels us; and since you say it will be inconvenient for you to discuss this question to-night, be so good as to fix an hour as early as may be to-morrow morning when we may have it thoroughly sifted. And as to scorning the attentions of your housekeeper, such a thought never for a moment entered our heads. We only wished to avoid giving the old lady unnecessary trouble, and we shall still prefer to do our own hair and dress ourselves. But if the housekeeper chooses to bring us our warm water, put our things straight,

and see us safe to bed, I am sure that neither my sister nor I will have the slightest objection.'

Somewhat mollified by this speech, the Giant said he would tell Dame Skrinklegriggs, and muttered something about 'seeing after the other business to-morrow morning,' with which the sisters were obliged to be contented. They declined dinner, however, on the score of being greatly fatigued after their long journey, and having had some tea in their own rooms, went early to bed.

The night was passed scarcely as quietly as they might have wished, inasmuch as the household of a giant is generally one of riot and revelry. Being, however, nearly worn out with the day's exertions, the sisters slept soundly, and were obliged to be roused by Dame Skrinklegriggs, a withered, blear-eyed, old crone nearly as ill-favoured as the giant himself, who accomplished her purpose by untucking the clothes at the foot of Malvina's bed, and pinching her great toe violently, that being among giants the approved mode of waking the heavy sleeper. The faithful Pincher passed the night under the sofa in the drawing-room, and, having taken care to avoid the Giant's eye, joined the Princesses as they descended the grand staircase, and once more entered the drawing-room, whence they were ushered by obsequious lacqueys into the dining-room in which the giant usually breakfasted. He was already there, and roared out his welcome as soon as the sisters made their appearance.

'Now, my little ducklings,' he said, 'come and breakfast with your old uncle Pattle-perry. You must get used to our ways at once, for now I've got ye I shall

keep ye,' and he laughed and grinned more hideously than ever.

'Sir,' observed Malvina sternly, 'neither my sister nor I are disposed for joking at present.'

'Do you call it joking indeed?' rejoined the Giant. 'Were the King your father here, he would tell you that it is no joke to be once within the walls of the Castle of Pattle-perry. But more of this anon: fall to and eat, my lambkins!'

'Not so, sir,' exclaimed Pettina, now stepping to the front. 'You deferred until this morning the business upon which we have come to your kingdom, and we must now press upon you that immediate search be made for our brother.'

'Hoity, toity! pig's fry and potatoes!' laughed the Giant at these words. 'Must you rule everybody, little lassie? Suppose I will have nothing to say to your request? What then, eh?'

Pettina regarded him with a steady gaze: 'Ri-too-ri—' she began.

'Hold!' cried the Giant: 'Don't sing at breakfast time! But what the dickens should I know of your brother?'

'Sir,' exclaimed Malvina hastily, 'we know that you carried him away nine years ago and we want him back!'

'No!' roared the Giant. 'Who told you that? Bumble-bees and blackberries! Somebody has been telling tales out of school! But suppose somebody has told a cram—a buster—a story—a regular downright fib? Am I a likely fellow to trouble myself to

carry off a boy? Don't you go and believe everything you hear, my pretty little poppets!'

'Then sir,' promptly replied Pettina, 'if you had nothing to do with carrying him off, you cannot object to enquiry being made for him.'

'Not a bit of it!' cried the Giant. 'Only let us have a bit of an agreement. If I find your brother for you, one of you will have to marry me, and stay and live here always!'

At this remark the sisters felt a thrill of horror run through them, but, thinking it best to dissemble, Malvina, as soon as she could find voice to speak, answered the Giant in these words:

'We cannot think of marriage, sir, until our brother is found and restored to his disconsolate parents: then, indeed, gratitude to the restorer will incline us most kindly towards him, whoever he may be.'

'Well said, young lady,' cried the Giant at this speech. 'But now, pray tell me, how shall you discover your brother if you see him after so long an absence? He must be mightily changed since you last saw him.'

Thus interrogated, the Princesses looked at each other with some doubt and distress, for this was a difficulty which had never hitherto struck them. Nothing daunted, however, the clever and thoughtful Pettina presently pulled out from her pocket a copy of the original advertisement, published, as has been already mentioned, upon the loss of Prince Mirabel, and this she handed to the Giant, who attentively regarded it, although as, like most other giants, he was

unable to read, he derived but little information from the document. However, the thought crossed his mind that if any fair description of the boy were given in this paper, he might easily palm off upon the girls one of his people, and thus obtain from their gratitude the promise of marriage which he saw would be otherwise difficult, especially as Pettina, at least, appeared to have a certain knowledge of magic, and it was her he rather preferred of the two. So, under pretence of making some enquiries he left the room, and submitted the advertisement to his housekeeper, who read and explained it to him.

'Well,' said he, on hearing what were its contents, 'I don't see why we shouldn't try it on. Let me see. It will be easy to produce a diamond-set girdle, for ten to one the Princesses won't recollect the right one; then, "on his arm a mark blue." I wish it were "black and blue," for most of the servants in the palace could show marks answering to that description. Search and look, Dame Skrinklegriggs, and send up some one soon with whom I may satisfy these girls.'

When the old housekeeper had promised to do her best, the Giant returned to the Princesses, and told them that he had good hope of being able to produce their brother, for that he had just heard that there was a youth attached to his household who had wandered there, no one knew whence, about the time of the loss, and who certainly had on a girdle of the description mentioned, and a mark upon his arm of a decidedly bluish tinge. This speedy compliance with their wishes surprised and pleased the sisters, but Pincher took an opportunity of winking his eye when

the Giant was not looking, as if to caution them against being deceived. No long time elapsed before a knock at the door was heard, and a young man was ushered into their presence. He was tall and well-built, and generally of good appearance, although the Princesses could recognise no resemblance to their brother's features. Then the Giant commanded him to bare his arm, which he did, having previously, however, endeavoured to embrace his supposed sisters, which they declined to allow, and having given a short statement of having been lost in the forest, and having strayed into the coal country, upon which they did not care to question him until the mark had first been seen. Accordingly, he bared his right arm and displayed an undoubted blue mark which would have corresponded with the advertisement perfectly well.

'This, then, must be your lost brother!' cried the Giant.

'Alas, sir!' answered Malvina, 'the only drawback we at present perceive was, that the blue mark upon our brother was upon the *left* and not the *right* arm; so that this cannot be he.'

At this the Giant flew into a passion, which, however, he had the discretion to vent upon the young man, whom he denounced as an impostor, and vowed he should be torn in pieces by wild dogs forthwith. The Princesses, however, begged that he might be pardoned, since no one really suffered from his fault, and this they did the more earnestly as they were now well convinced that the Giant had himself concocted the fraud. They then asked him again to be

so good as to direct further enquiries to be made; to which he somewhat reluctantly consented, being impelled thereto by the conduct of Pettina, who kept her eye upon him, and hummed the magic word in a low tone whenever she saw him inclined to adopt his natural tone and quit the politeness which he had assumed for the occasion.

At last he promised that all the younger members of his household should be paraded before luncheon, and that the youths from the colliery should pass before the Princesses in the afternoon. This was accordingly done, but without any satisfactory result. Several people showed blue marks on their arms; and such was the desire which each of them had to be proclaimed a Prince, and the brother of two such lovely ladies, that they all declared they had strayed into that country nine years ago with a diamond-set girdle around them. But the sisters were not to be taken in: they knew of more than the advertisement, and either the unusual toe or the scratch on the thigh, proved fatal to all the claims which were advanced. At last the two Princesses became quite tired of the amusement, and plainly told the Giant that they believed he knew all about their brother, and was only trifling with them. The wily Pattle-perry assured them that they were mistaken, and was about to make some further excuses, when he suddenly exclaimed:

'Ah! here comes a friend who will help us all out of our difficulties.'

Looking round, the young ladies perceived a very small gig with a very small man in it, driving along at a great pace, and rapidly approaching them. At

the sight of this man Pincher trembled violently, and crouched behind the sisters. The new comer was clad in a bottle-green coat with brass buttons, white waistcoat and kerseymere trowsers, and he wore upon his head a glazed sailor's hat, gaily ornamented with buttercups, daisies, and dandelions stuck all around it.

'How are you, Macklethorpe?' shouted the Giant in a loud voice, as the little man drove up.

'So-so, thank you, Royal Pattle-perry,' replied the other. 'But I have come to tell you to be on your guard. That nasty little Rindelgrover is out on mischief somewhere. I know it from a pig which I met and killed as I was driving on the edge of the forest, and who confessed it in the hopes of my sparing his life, which I didn't, knowing your fondness for pork, and wishing to make you a present. The little scamp is, I have good reason to believe, within your kingdom at this moment — perhaps within your very presence. To prevent mischief, therefore, I have brought my magic onion, with which, when one touches one's eyes one can penetrate every disguise, however cleverly assumed; so in a moment or two we shall know whether I have been rightly informed.'

So saying, the wily Dwarf put his hand into his trowsers' pocket, pulled out an onion, and gently touched his eyes with it; then he looked right and left, and presently his eyes fell upon the two Princesses.

'Daisies and dandelions!' he cried, 'why here are the two daughters of the King of the Flowery Meads! who'd have thought of seeing *them* here of all people!'

Out laughed the Giant as he heard this observation.

'Sweet girls!' he said. 'Know you not, Macklethorpe, that these maidens claim me as their Uncle Pattle-perry? they have come to look for their brother forsooth—ha ha!'

At these words, and at the manner of the speaker, Pettina grew very angry, and stepping quickly forward was about to address to the Giant some remark by which he would not have been flattered. Unfortunately, the suddenness of her movement left Pincher for a moment unconcealed, and the eyes of the Dwarf Macklethorpe fell directly upon him. With a shrill yell, which so startled the girl that she quite forgot what she was about to say, the Dwarf screamed out frantically:

'That's he! that's he! I see him! I see him! The little beast has taken the shape of a dog! Kill him! kill him!'

And now ensued a most extraordinary scene. Macklethorpe placed one of his hands on the small of his back, the other on his forehead, and uttered a strange sound, immediately after which he became a large bull-terrier of twice the size and weight of his adversary, and rushed furiously at him. But Rindelgrover was equal to the occasion; curving his tail over his back, lifting his paw on to his nose, and giving vent in his turn to a wondrous noise, he instantly became a tremendously powerful mastiff, from whom the bull-terrier had only just time to escape. In another instant, however, he reappeared in the form of a tiger, with whom the mastiff would have

had but little chance had he not, with equal celerity, converted himself into a lion, and stood boldly in front of his enemy, roaring horribly. Macklethorpe, not to be outdone, immediately changed into a rhinoceros, and secure in his impenetrable hide, savagely ran at the lion, who as quickly became a pigeon, and darted off at best speed. Within a second a large hawk followed the poor bird, which would certainly have been in great danger had not Pettina at this eventful moment recovered her presence of mind and her voice together, and loudly shouted, 'Macklethorpe! hawk!' Ri-too-ri-lal-lural!' The effect was instantaneous. The pigeon flew off unharmed, whilst the hawk, suddenly stopping in its flight, wheeled round, alighted on the ground, and speedily resumed its proper shape, disclosing a countenance full of baffled spite and rage, as the owner stood before the young Princesses.

'O-o-o-o-o-h!' he bellowed out as soon as he could find breath to do so. *You* are friends with that little wood-beast, are you? *You've* learned how to help your friends, have you? That's it, is it? But you haven't learned everything yet, I can tell you! You called me by my name when you used that word of power just now. When you do *that* you can't use that word to me any more for a month, my vixen; so now you shall find out what it is to have made an enemy of me. You little puny, skinny, scullery-maid of a girl—how dare you?'

So saying, the infuriated Dwarf stepped up to the poor Pettina, who had unwittingly fallen into so serious an error, and seemed much inclined to inflict

upon her personal chastisement then and there. But Malvina stood forward with her queenly air and waved the little man backwards.

'How dare you use such words to a lady?' said she. 'Remember that *I* have not called you by your name, and I will not have harm done to my sister.'

At this the Dwarf recoiled for a moment, but having recovered himself, he accosted the Giant in these words:

'Great and Royal Pattle-perry, you have seen how these two she-foxes have deceived you.' By so doing they have certainly given you every right to consider them as your slaves, and as such I certainly advise you to treat them. They may talk big and think great things of themselves if they please, but so long as you do not lay violent hands on them, they will find their magic word of little value against *my* magic arts. I would confine them in separate dungeons and keep them there until they make humble submission to you and consent to do whatever you require of them.'

The poor sisters were so oppressed by the departure of their friend, and so overwhelmed by the words of the Dwarf, who appeared to know so much, that they knew not what to do, and when the Giant, evidently enraged at the deception practised upon him by Rindelgrover, gave the orders suggested by the Dwarf, they suffered themselves to be led away without a murmur or remonstrance. It was not, however, to a dungeon they were taken, but to two small rooms in a high tower, in one of the wings of the Giant's palace. This was called the 'turret

tower,' and was ascended by a spiral staircase. The Princesses were conducted up to a considerable height from the ground, until they came to a landing from which doors opened right and left into two rooms, one of which was appropriated to each of them. This was the first real trouble they had had to endure, and it was rendered worse by the fact of their being separated for the first time in their lives. They wept bitterly, and would have felt inclined to give way to despair, if it had not been that their pride of birth and the old courage of their race alike forbade them to do so.

So having cried as much as they thought necessary, they each began to look about them, and then discovered that not only was there only one wall between their two rooms, but that, although this was of a thick and substantial character, grates had been let in at one or two places, for the purpose of ventilation, through which they could without difficulty converse from time to time. As this tower faced the mountain-side down which the Princesses had descended into the Giant's country, the intelligent reader will at once remark that the side windows of the rooms in which the sisters were confined naturally afforded a view right and left. It so happened that Malvina had the right hand, Pettina the left hand view, and each described to the other that which she saw.

'Pettina, my darling!' said her elder sister, 'I can see miles and miles away; the tower is so high that I almost lose my eyesight in the distance—it seems endless.'

'But what do you see?' asked the other.

'Why, far, far away I see the waters of the blue sea. The country from hence is rough and rugged for some way, but beyond it I see green fields and trees far off, and the sea still farther off; and I see islands dotted about in the expanse of blue ocean. One, two, three—several of them—they must be very, very far off.'

'And I,' said Pettina in her turn, 'I also see a long way. First comes the country such as you describe it, rough and rugged and barren,'and then I see a large tract of beautiful meadows and corn-lands, and a beautiful large river winding its way through what is evidently a fertile country; but it seems a long way off!' and Pettina sighed as she spoke.

At that moment they heard a voice on the staircase, and in another moment Malvina's room was entered by no less a personage than Dame Skrinklegriggs herself.

'Well, my fine Miss,' she began at once, setting her arms akimbo. 'So you've been trying to humbug the master, have you, you brother-hunting jackanapes? I'll warrant me you'll be cured,of your tantrums before we've done with you! Here's your supper, my young hussy; bread and water—and that's all the victuals you are likely to get for some time to come, *I* can tell you!'

So saying, the old woman put down a jug of water and a loaf of stale bread upon the table, and as Malvina vouchsafed her no answer, went away to the next room muttering to herself. She entered Pettina's room, and accosted her in much the same manner, assuring her that she would never leave that tower,

unless the Giant was fool enough to marry her, in which case she would most likely soon follow the fate of the seventeen wives whom he had already wedded and sent off into the coal-pits as soon as he got tired of them. As Pettina thought this was very likely an invention of the old woman's, she took no notice of it, and, finding she was not likely to get much out of either of her prisoners, the housekeeper shortly afterwards took her departure. The night passed wearily for the two Princesses. Sleep was absent from their pillows, and to the recollection of their lost brother was added their own misfortune, involving a captivity which appeared, for all they could tell, likely to be permanent.

They were early astir upon the following day, and wished each other 'good morning' through the grating. It was a lovely morning: the sun was shining brightly in at their windows, and everything looked beautiful in his glowing light. As soon as the sisters had dressed, and eaten the frugal breakfast of bread and water which had been left them over-night by the crabbed old housekeeper, each repaired to her window in order to gaze upon the view therefrom, which appeared likely to be the principal amusement by which their captivity would be lightened. At the same instant each gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

'Pettina! Pettina!' cried Malvina; 'I see an army of white horses, miles away still, but evidently coming in this direction. Can it be that they are coming to help us poor girls?'

'Oh, Malvina!' cried her sister; 'what do you think *I* see? Thousands upon thousands of swans!

the air is positively dark with them, although they are as yet at some distance! What *can* it mean?'

Whilst they were still giving vent to such exclamations as these, suddenly a bird flew up against Pettina's window and pecked loudly for admittance. The Princess immediately threw open the window and in flew the bird. It was a pigeon, and had scarcely alighted in the room when it made sundry contortions, and directly afterwards assumed the form of the Dwarf Rindelgrover.

'Dear Princess!' he exclaimed as soon as he was sufficiently recovered to speak. 'All will go well with you and your sister. Be not afraid. The King of the Islands is coming at the head of his army on white horses, and the River King is half way here with his swans, against which it is well known no magic power can ever prevail. I have hurried here as fast as possible in order to relieve your anxiety, and must now go and tell your lovely sister the good news.'

'You need not do that,' said a voice through the grating, which they recognised at once to be that of Malvina. 'I could not help hearing what you said, and am overjoyed to hear that succour is near at hand.'

Scarcely had she spoken, before a loud noise of voices was heard upon the stairs, and in a few moments messengers from the Giant appeared, who had been ordered to conduct the Princesses to the drawing-room without an instant's delay. Before they left their rooms, however, the good Rindelgrover had just time to change himself into a bluebottle fly, and

buzzing round the heads of the two sisters as they descended the stairs, he told them that if the magic word was at all weakened in its force as regarded Macklethorpe, by what had passed, the word 'Fol-de-rol-liddle,' repeated after it, would be quite too much for him. Thus cautioned and advised, the Princesses entered the drawing-room, where they found the Giant pacing up and down in great agitation and excitement, whilst Macklethorpe was sitting cross-legged on the hearth-rug. As soon as ever he saw them, the owner of the palace began to speak.

'What does this mean?' he said. 'I received you kindly; I denied you no request; yet you have introduced an enemy into my kingdom, and I am now informed that an army is advancing against my people from two separate quarters. Queer kind of nieces are ye, I think!'

'Sir,' returned Malvina in a grave tone, 'we have done you no wrong, neither do we desire that any evil should befall you: only give us our brother and let us go, and we will do our best to prevent mischief.'

'Harrico your brother, and you too!' cried the Giant in a rage. 'I'll see about both of you presently. Meantime I shall leave you in friend Macklethorpe's charge, for I must go and drive off those friends of yours, whom I hear of as coming to invade my country. When I return I shall probably marry one of you girls myself, and give the other to Macklethorpe; so now you know what to expect;' and with these words he left the room in a passion.

Macklethorpe now rose from the hearth-rug, and

approached Pettina, under whose sleeve the Bluebottle fly had carefully hidden himself.

'Now, my vixen,' he said, 'you are under my care for the day, so you had better behave yourself. When the Giant has slain and captured your friends, you will see what fools you and your sister have been to come on this wild-goose chase after your brother.'

'Wild-goose chase, indeed!' retorted Pettina; 'you had better take care you don't have to deal with swans instead of geese.'

As she spoke she glanced at the windows, and saw the swan army rapidly approaching the castle, while the shouts upon the other side told that the army of white horsemen were already engaged with the Giant's people. Irritated by her words, the Dwarf approached close to her and raised his hand as if to bestow upon her the undignified rebuke of a slap on the cheek. The indignant Princess stepped hastily backwards, exclaiming as she did so—'Ri-too-ri-lal-lural!'

'That cock won't fight, my pert miss,' cried the Dwarf; and advancing a step nearer, actually aimed a blow at her fair cheek with his wicked hand.

'Fol-de-rol-liddle!' cried the girl in an alarmed tone as he did so.

The effect was magical—the blow fell short, but the hand of the little man dropped lightly upon her arm, and in so doing shook the bluebottle fly out upon the floor. Hardly had he touched it when he assumed his proper shape once again. Macklethorpe started back at the sight; magical power was suspended for the moment before the force of natural instincts, and

with a mutual yell of fury the two Dwarfs rushed savagely upon each other, striking right and left in ungovernable rage. The sisters, with clasped hands, stood watching the combat, almost insensible to the loud cries of battle which were all the time filling the air outside the castle. Both the little men fought desperately. Macklethorpe scratched, bit, and kicked with an almost supernatural energy; whilst Rindelgrover, hopping about with marvellous agility, planted some terrible blows upon the face of his enraged adversary. The sisters would willingly have said the magic words, had they not feared what the effect might be upon their friend so long as he had not the worst of the combat. At last, however, he had decidedly the best of it, for a well-aimed blow taking effect upon the nose of Macklethorpe, stretched him upon the floor. Rindelgrover, without an instant's delay, leaped upon him with a cry of triumph, when at that very instant the doors of the drawing-room were thrown violently open, and new characters appeared upon the scene. Foremost among these were two men of royal appearance, armed to the teeth, and evidently just emerged from the fray. They led between them, conquered and bound, none other than the Giant Pattle-perry himself. It needed no wizard to inform the sisters who were the victors who thus appeared. The noble King of the Islands was on one side, the young and handsome River King on the other. With joyful and triumphant looks they led their captive to the feet of the two Princesses, to whom they made a lowly obeisance.

'Royal ladies!' said the King of the Islands, who,

being the eldest, was, according to the fashion of those barbarous times, entitled to speak first: 'we bring you your vanquished enemy, and place his life at your disposal.'

Both sisters clasped their hands in speechless gratitude, and then, when they found their voices, both exclaimed at once, 'Oh, noble Kings! can you make him restore our brother?'

'Dear ladies,' said the River King, 'that is already done. Come forth, Prince Merry.'

Scarcely had he uttered the words, when a young and singularly handsome youth came forward, in whom the sisters both instinctively recognised their long-lost brother, and immediately rushed to embrace him, for which he appeared to be perfectly prepared.

'Oh! where have you been all these long years?' they exclaimed both together, and fell to hugging and kissing him again, before they could possibly receive an answer.

'Let me explain to you what we have discovered,' rejoined the King of the Islands, 'and all the more so because it may incline your tender hearts to show some mercy to your unfortunate captive. It is true that the Giant did what Rindelgrover has already told you. He enticed the boy away from his nurse, principally, I believe, for the sake of his diamond-set girdle, and carried him off to his own country. However, when there, he conceived so great an affection for the young Prince that he determined to adopt him as his heir. Accordingly, he had him educated by the best tutors he could procure, and has invariably treated him with the greatest kindness, excepting

always that his utmost endeavours have been employed to make the boy forget his family and his native country. No wonder, then, that he attempted to deceive you in every possible way, and to palm off impostors upon you as your brother. He has failed, however, and, moreover, the young Prince has by no means forgotten his old home and relations. Here he is safe and sound, and you will have the satisfaction of restoring him to his and your anxious parents. Now, what shall be done with the Robber-giant who has caused all these troubles? We have taken him entirely by surprise. The oppressed people of his country received us gladly; we have completely routed and dispersed his army, most of whom have either been ridden down by my white horsemen, or have had their left eyes pecked out by the swan warriors of my royal brother. In fact, the Giant is at your mercy, and you have only to say the word and his head shall be struck off immediately.'

'Oh no!' cried both the sisters simultaneously; and then Malvina continued: 'We should be sorry indeed to return evil for evil, especially as the Giant has done us no harm in reality, and the joy of recovering our dear brother has effaced from our minds the trouble we have endured. Let him live, provided that he will take an oath never to interfere with our father's kingdom again or to carry off straggling children, be they princes or peasants.'

At these words the Giant's face, which had hitherto been mightily downcast, lighted up with a sudden joy.

'Lovely and merciful ladies!' he exclaimed, in a

deep but trembling voice, 'I will swear by the Great Giant Oath—by all that giants hold sacred, by anything else you please—to be your faithful vassal and slave to the end of my days, if you will but spare my life. Your brother is safe and sound, and had I not loved him as my own son, and intended to make him my heir, he might have gone home long ago. Say, Prince, do I not speak the truth?'

'It is quite true,' said Prince Merry, in a voice of singular sweetness, 'that I have no recollection of anything but kindness since I have been here, although now that memory has been awakened and I recognise my beloved sisters, I feel a sense of the cruel wrong which has been done me in depriving me for so long a time of their sweet society. But I give my voice for mercy, and hope that we may henceforth all be friends. Meanwhile, what are the little men doing?'

At these words everybody looked round at the two Dwarfs, who had been forgotten during the above conversation. Rindelgrover was still standing upon his prostrate enemy, and giving from time to time a triumphant stamp upon him which must have been the reverse of agreeable. As soon as attention was called to them, Macklethorpe, with a deep groan, besought the Princesses to call off his adversary, and they accordingly begged their little friend to spare his fallen foe. Thus requested, the worthy Rindelgrover desisted from his amusement, and the crestfallen Macklethorpe arose, bruised and vanquished, and with the breath nearly stamped out of his body. The Wood Dwarf was at first inclined to claim him for a slave as the reward for all he had done, but on its being put

to him forcibly by Pettina that he would in the long run gain more by generosity, and that a slave who detested him would be less useful than a friend bound to him by ties of gratitude; he was gradually brought round to that view of the case, and agreed that his enemy should be spared and liberated, on condition of owning himself inferior to his conqueror, and binding himself never more to destroy the pigs of the latter.

The rest of the story will not take long to tell. The victorious army having feasted royally at the Giant's expense, prepared shortly afterwards for their departure. Old Dame Skrinklegriggs, however, first appeared upon the scene. Dreadfully afraid that her impertinent language to the two Princesses would be remembered against her, she endeavoured to atone for it by the most abject servility and fawning adulation. Throwing herself at the feet of the sisters, she exclaimed:

'Oh, Royal Ladies—more lovely than ladies ever were before, and more charming than any that shall ever come after you. Beautiful creatures, have mercy on an old servant who has only erred from zeal for her old master! Let me kiss your feet and be your slave for ever, and bear no malice against so humble a being as I am.'

At these words the sisters smiled.

'Be under no apprehension, old woman,' said Malvina. 'We scarce remember your words, and have no thought of injuring you. Still, we would advise you and all others who hear us to remember that civility

costs nothing, and is far more becoming than harsh and rude language.'

With these words she dismissed the old housekeeper, who was overjoyed at having escaped so easily. Then the whole party proceeded to leave the palace on their way back to the old home of Prince Merry, taking with them the Giant, to present as a prisoner to the injured King and Queen, though they had no doubt that these would ratify the sentence already pronounced by their daughters.

It would be hopeless for me to attempt to describe the entry into the Kingdom of the Flowery Meads, or the meeting between the parents and their long-lost son. Universal joy spread all over the kingdom, a general holiday took place, and nobody did any work for a month, which greatly interrupted the trade of the country and so damaged its revenue that there had to be new taxes the year after in order to make up the deficiency. However, nobody cared for that or for anything else, now that the Prince was back again. The nursery-maid and soldier were not forgotten in the general happiness, but were set free from their cage and told that they might now be married as soon as they liked. But somehow or other, nine years of each other's company had so altered their views of matrimony as between themselves, that they respectfully declined the offered boon, and preferred to take a separate course in their future lives. There was marrying, however, at the Court, and that before long. The King of the Islands proclaimed his continued devotion to Malvina; the River King was no less attached to Pettina, and the Princesses, swayed

by emotions of mingled love and gratitude, consented to share the fortunes of their royal suitors. Accordingly, the weddings were celebrated upon the grandest scale which you can imagine. The Giant Pattle-perry was present, having received his pardon from the King and Queen, and solemnly vowed himself the vassal of the Kingdom of the Flowery Meads for ever and a day.

You may well believe that Rindelgrover was not absent from the ceremony, nor indeed from the banquet afterwards. Upon that occasion many interesting speeches were delivered, and more ale and wine consumed than had ever been the case before in that country. Everybody enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and everything passed off remarkably well. Of course Prince Merry was the hero of the evening. His health was drunk with 'nine times nine and one cheer more,' and in return he made a speech which delighted everybody, though, for the matter of that, as everybody was determined beforehand to be delighted, it did not much signify what he said.

It is needless to relate anything further of the history of these good people. The King and Queen passed the remainder of their days in great and uninterrupted happiness. The worthy Rindelgrover was always a welcome guest at Court, and much amused the royal family by his eccentric observations and curious ways. Sometimes Prince Merry wandered with him in the forest, over the animals of which he held such authority. At the particular request of the Prince he was induced to allow them to abandon the somewhat monotonous chorus of 'Well done, Rindel-

grover!' which he had imposed upon them as an acknowledgment of his sovereignty, and after a while he was persuaded to prefer a pony to a pig when in want of equestrian exercise. Otherwise he remained the same to the day of his death, if that day ever arrived. Of that I have no certain information. I can only tell you the legends of dwarfs and giants which the Fairies tell me from time to time, and they generally like to leave off with the good people in the story alive and happy. So let it be, then, with our present tale. I have no reason to doubt that Prince Merry, his sisters and their husbands, are at this moment living, well and prosperous, nor have I any reason to suppose the contrary of the conquered Giant, or any other of the personages of whom I have spoken. Let us suppose them so, at all events, and having consoled ourselves with this supposition, bring to a conclusion the wonderful history of Prince Merry and his charming sisters.

II.

THE HISTORY OF A ROOK.

OF late years it has been the fashion for animals of various sorts and sizes to relate their history for the benefit of a curious world. I feel that I need no excuse for following an example which has been set by many whose species entitles them to no more consideration than my own, and who have possibly seen less of stirring adventure than it has been my fate to witness. And although I am only a bird, I do not see, for my own part, why birds have not as good a right as anybody else to come before the reading public. A horse is frequently termed a noble animal. A dog is thought to have special claims upon the sympathy of men; and both dogs and horses have frequently thought it right and becoming to appear in print. Nevertheless, I feel entitled to observe that birds of my race are, in one respect at least, superior to both dogs and horses. These are, after all, the obedient slaves of man. Trained to obey his will, taught from earliest youth to acknowledge his superiority, they pass their existence for the most part in willing thraldom, ignorant of those free aspirations and that untrammelled liberty of which I and my feathered comrades can truly boast. Not that this is

equally applicable to all birds. The parrot, ignominiously seated upon his perch, looks to man for his daily pittance of food, screeches out that which they suppose to be his gratitude in inharmonious accents, and seeks no higher aim than occasionally to imitate the tones and words of his enslavers. The starling, the magpie, and other kindred birds, from time to time own the dominion of man. The unhappy thrush too often languishes in his wicker cage, suspended before the cottage door of his unfeeling master; and even the crafty jackdaw frequently becomes the pet and plaything of the human race. But who ever heard of a tame rook? My noble race loves, indeed, to domicile itself near the haunts of men; but this is rather with the object of proving to our young, by the force of daily contrast, our innate and immense superiority over the unfeathered bipeds who walk the earth from which they cannot rise, and pass a wingless life in a conceited belief in their own greatness. Often and often have I seen them walking near, though not as a rule beneath, my native rookery, and wondered to myself how such tame crawling creatures could have the arrogance to deem themselves the lords of that creation which contains so many nobler races. But as my intention to-day is not to point a moral, but to relate a history, I will proceed at once to the performance of my task.

I am a rook of old family. All rooks are rooks of old family. Unlike human beings, who depend upon the preservation of written records, without which they are not supposed among their fellows to have established a claim to good family and high descent, we

rooks, acting upon the glorious principle of universal equality, recognise in our community the undoubted fact that we all descend from common ancestors who existed in remote antiquity, and we require no written proof to establish the fact that we are all illustrious, and all of high descent. I could tell you where I was born, aye, to the very tree and to the very nest. I could describe the place which had the honour of witnessing my birth. But I forbear. There may be those yet alive to whom a minute description of the locality might be painful, and no right-minded rook ever willingly gives pain to anyone.

Yet as I recall the old familiar scene, I feel a strange longing to make others acquainted with the spot which I still love so dearly. How well do I remember the place! The group of waving elms in which our nests were built, standing as they did at the extreme end of a wood which joined close up to a farm-yard, had the double advantage of proximity to rich corn-fields on one side of the aforesaid wood, and pleasant meadows, well stocked with friendly sheep, on the other.

There was the pond too, at the end of the farmyard nearest the rookery, whereon sundry ducks quacked a homely accompaniment to our domestic cawing, and frantic hens cackled in agony over the supposed danger of the little ducklings whom they had unwittingly hatched. The orchard hard by, with its apple and cherry trees laden with luxuriant fruit; the large walnut tree famous for its size and quantity of nuts, which stood opposite the stable; the high old-fashioned hedges which enclosed the meadows; the winding paths cut through the home wood, and the trim old-fashioned

garden, with its high brick wall around it;—all these things come back to my memory, and seem to flit before my aged eyes as I muse over the early and happy days of my youth. But stay: I have said enough of a place which you, dear reader, cannot identify, and to think of which, now that I am so far from it, makes my beak feel dry and my eyes watery. So I ruffle up my old feathers, give my tail a shake, and taking in my claw the pen which my kind old neighbour Owl has manufactured for me out of the feather of a wood-pigeon's wing, set myself to tell you that which I have to relate.

This beak, which many years have hardened, was soft and tender when its first infant effort chipped the egg which contained my puny form. I cannot actually remember the event, but from what I have seen in after years, I imagine that I must have presented a somewhat ridiculous appearance when I first emerged from the maternal shell. My first distinct recollection is of the ousting from the nest of two little creatures, brothers and sisters I suppose, I know not which, on whom my mother had unfortunately trodden, and the sending after them of an egg at which we little ones had stared for some hours as at an object of immense interest, but which the wiser instincts of my mother discovered to be rotten.

There were three of us left, and certainly we had nothing to complain of in our treatment. Never had young rooks a more devoted mother, or a father who better understood the duty of bringing home slugs and other tender edibles to his as yet helpless off-

spring. Well nurtured and cared for, we grew daily in size, and improved in health and vigour.

Our naked forms became gradually covered with protecting feathers, although it was some time before they acquired that black and glossy appearance which is so highly valued among rooks who value their personal beauty. As days rolled on, although we grew bigger, our nest unfortunately did not follow our example, and consequently that which had at first seemed to us, as indeed it was, a spacious and commodious abode, began to afford scant accommodation for our developing frames. In short, we were more crowded than was at all pleasant, and I do not know how we should have managed, had not our maternal parent one day suggested that there was an outside as well as an inside to every nest, and that we must not confine ourselves entirely to the latter. She conveyed her meaning in a somewhat forcible manner, pushing us all three bodily over the side of the nest, and bidding us take the fresh air as best we could.

Trembling with fright, we sat shivering on the nearest branches, our little hearts penetrated with the most profound grief at that which appeared to us the cruel and unnatural conduct of the mother in whose love we had hitherto so implicitly trusted. Ah! we did not know then, as I know well enough now, that our parents are the best judges of what is good for us, and that things which sometimes seem harsh and unjust to us are really intended for our benefit, and are in fact the very best things which could have happened to us. So indeed it was in this case. We soon learned to balance ourselves on the branches

without fear of falling, then we found that we could easily hop from twig to twig, and meanwhile the exposure to the open air gave new strength and hardihood to our bodies. Then, joy of joys, we awoke to the knowledge of the great fact that we had wings! Never shall I forget the moment when this first dawned upon my infant mind! It was again through the agency of my mother, who, after I had sat for a day or two as near as I could to the nest (to which we were still allowed to return at meal-times and for the night), flew quietly up to me one morning and deliberately pushed me off my perch. With a croak of horror, down I fell, expecting nothing less than instant destruction. Great, however, was my surprise and delight to find myself most agreeably undeceived. Guided by some natural instinct, I spread out my wings, and immediately found that I had not only arrested my fall by so doing, but that I was able to flutter away to another branch without the slightest difficulty, and could sustain myself in the air as well as another bird. My brother and sister, having been similarly treated by our mother, and with the same result, were equally pleased with the discovery of their new powers, and we all three felt as proud as cock pheasants.

Day by day we made trial of our new wings, and very shortly found that we could fly from tree to tree with tolerable ease, and that a little more practice and some additional strength would soon enable us to take a longer and more daring flight. We warmly thanked our beloved mother for having taught us that great lesson of self-reliance which is so necessary for

a young rook or indeed for anybody else who hopes to succeed in the world, and a new vista of joyous and peaceful life seemed opening out before us. But alas! it was rudely interrupted. This world is full of cares and woes, and I have observed that oftentimes when our happiness is the greatest, our hearts the lightest, and our prospects apparently the best, misfortune falls upon us, as if to prove to us the vanity and instability of earthly happiness. So it was with regard to the happy family to which I then belonged.

On a beautiful morning in the month of May, I was surprised by a sudden commotion in the rookery. Respectable middle-aged rooks, ordinarily accustomed to wing their steady flight from field to field, and some of whom had been recently engaged in the domestic occupation consequent upon the nesting season, suddenly rose on all sides high into the air, and uttering shrill cries of affright and dismay, wheeled in eddying circles far above the trees which composed our rookery. At first I thought that the world had gone mad that May morning, or that my elders were indulging in some wild and extraordinary pastime as yet unknown to the juvenile members of the society. But before long I became painfully aware that the movement of our fathers and mothers was caused by their knowledge of the proximity of awful danger to their young. A loud stunning report deafened my ears—a report which arose, as it seemed, from the ground below the rookery, and was succeeded by a redoubling of the cries of affright uttered by the parent birds. Eagerly peering through the branches of the tree in which I sat, I perceived three individuals

standing in the precincts of our sacred grove. One of them carried in his hand a weapon which as I have since discovered is familiarly known among men as a pea-rifle. This person was evidently the chief of the party, for one of the others carried his ammunition, while the awful occupation of the third became only too soon apparent. The gunner kept up a steady fire against such of our youthful companions as exposed their bodies to his aim, and when any ill-fated rook dropped upon the ground, as, alas! was but too frequently the case, this third man hastened to gather the bleeding body of the victim, and placed it beneath a tree, where before long a goodly array of murdered victims lay side by side. For the first few moments, while this continuous firing was going on, I hardly realised its meaning, or the perils of my own position. But my brother, and sister, and myself were seated upon a bough near the maternal nest, and afforded but too obvious an object to the eager marksman. Ere long I perceived him standing beneath our very tree, with his deadly weapon pointing directly upwards. Even yet, we none of us realised the dangerous position in which we were placed; but in another moment the awful sound rang in our ears, and we heard the shrill whistle of a bullet passing close above our heads. Being still, however, unacquainted with the nature of firearms, we remained still and silent, whilst the marksman hastily reloaded, and again levelled his piece. This time the bullet struck the branch on which we were seated, almost severing it in two, and causing such a vibration as seriously disturbed us. We all cawed lustily, and slightly shifted our posi-

tion, though even now we remained fully exposed to view; but at the third shot, the bullet passing beneath me at a distance from my body, far too near to be pleasant, penetrated my tail feathers, and went whistling on in its upward journey. Being now thoroughly alarmed, I awoke to the necessity of adopting some measure to prevent greater damage to my sacred person, and being (though I say it that shouldn't) a rook of wariness beyond my years, I determined forthwith to seek shelter in our friendly nest. Without more ado, therefore, I hopped lightly to my refuge, and with a croak of satisfaction ensconced myself in the same place whence I had first seen the light of day from the inside of my parent egg.

O why did not my dear relations share at once my prudence and my safety! With a courage more resolute than wise, they maintained their position, and the very next bullet, striking my brother in the wing, wrung from him a moan of agony, and prevented his following my example. Horrified at the sound, I peered over the nest to watch what would follow, and waited in breathless expectation whilst the cruel enemy loaded and fired again, and this time with but too true an aim. The fatal bullet shot my brother full in the breast, and passing through from breast to back, left behind it only a lifeless carcase from which the bright young life had passed away for ever. The body of my innocent brother fell with a dull heavy thud upon the ground beneath, and soon swelled the heap of victims already collected by the attendant keeper. My sister, now fully awakened to a sense of her danger, hopped with trembling legs towards my place

of safety, uttering a faint caw of complaint and alarm. But before she reached the nest, another bullet, speeding on its deadly errand, struck the bough immediately beneath her, lacerated her right foot, and gave a shock to her nervous system from which she never afterwards entirely recovered. Happily, however, she succeeded in scrambling over the sticks and twigs of which our home was composed, and nestled down by my side in a state of alarm and agitation such as I have seldom or ever witnessed in a female rook.

Fortunately for us, there were so many of our species sitting out upon the different trees of the rookery, that the sportsman (if such a term can be rightly applied to a cruel rook-killing monster) found plenty of amusement without troubling us again, and we crouched down without further molestation during the rest of his stay, though our blood ran cold, and our hearts beat faster, at every sound of his horrible gun. But as all things in this world come to an end, so did this attack upon our peaceful homes, and our enemies at length retired, laden with the carcasses of our unhappy relatives. I could not imagine at that time the purpose for which the remains of our friends were thus carried off. But a singular conversation which I shortly afterwards overheard disclosed to me the horrid truth, whilst at the same time it afforded a notable example of the cringing and sycophantic nature of the human race.

Not many days after the occurrence which I have just related, a number of fiends in the shape of men, armed, not with pea-rifles, but with ordinary shot-guns, appeared in our luckless rookery, and opened a

cruel and destructive fire upon our unhappy race. Alas for the ruin and devastation which they spread around! In vain did youthful rooks send forth their wailing caw for pity and succour. In vain did the agitated and miserable parents wheel high above the heads of the gunners with plaintive and indignant cries, protesting against the unjustifiable slaughter of their young. They spoke to hearts harder than stone, and to beings inaccessible to the cries alike of suffering innocence and parental affection. By tens, aye, by twenties, the youth, the flower of rookdom fell around, and sadly were our numbers thinned by the continued onslaught of our merciless foes. Wise by experience, my sister and I at the first sound of the gun sought shelter in our nest, and remained there until the last of our enemies had departed.

It was on the afternoon of that same day that I, deafened with the cannonading which had been going on around us, and with a heart full of misery at the undeserved misfortune that had fallen upon our race, flew out from the rookery, and perched myself in the thickest part of a large chestnut tree which stood at a short distance from my home. From this post of observation I saw two men approach, and soon discovered that their purpose was to collect the bodies of the slain. One of these men, whom the other addressed as 'Jem,' evidently filled the honourable position of a gamekeeper. He had a black velveteen coat on, and a gun in his hand, which he deposited at the foot of my tree while performing the melancholy business on which he had come, and his evident assumption of superiority over his companion, together

with the deferential bearing of the latter, sufficiently indicated his official position. It was while they were resting from their labours beneath the tree in which I was perched, that the following conversation ensued.

'A fine lot o' young rooks, Jem, surelie,' said the other man.

'They be, Bristow, that they be,' was the reply; and presently, after a pause, 'They tell me, Bristow, that there's many people as thinks a rook pie better nor a pigeon pie. That can't be, but I don't know as it's a thing to be despised, after all is said and done.'

'Oh no,' replied the other, 'not noways to be despised, but nothing like a pigeon pie, o' course. Oh no, oh no.'

'And,' continued the keeper, 'I don't know but what a rook pie, if the rooks is young, and the crust made about right, very nigh comes up to a pigeon pie after all.'

'Sure it does,' returned Bristow in meditative tone, 'not so good as a pigeon pie, but very nigh it if rightly made, as you say.'

In another minute the keeper continued: 'And some folks will tell you, and as far as my opinion goes they're in the right of it, that just at this season, when the rooks is young and tender, a rook pie is quite as good as a pigeon pie, after all.'

'Very little difference,' replied Bristow at once, 'if the birds is young and tender, rook pie or pigeon pie, what's the difference?'

'And for my part,' added the keeper, '*I* like a rook pie better than what I do a pigeon pie, and that's the truth of it.'

'Oh yes,' responded Bristow without a moment's hesitation, 'better than any pigeon pie. Not a doubt of it.'

And so the conversation terminated. Though I could not help being amused at the obsequious servility of the cringing Bristow, this conversation explained to me the cause of the murderous onslaught made upon my hapless people, and revealed the fate which was to befall their carcasses. Stripped of their black and glossy feathers, they would doubtless be thrust into a pie or pudding, to gratify the palates of their greedy slaughterers, whom I devoutly hoped might be choked in the operation of devouring them. This, however, would after all be but a poor revenge for us survivors, and would not bring our lost ones back to life again. I could here indulge in many moral reflections upon the cruelty of man, and the sufferings of rooks and other birds and animals which he chooses to regard as his lawful prey. But I prefer, and perhaps my readers may agree with me, to quit a theme which, as far as I am concerned, is fraught with melancholy recollections, and pass on to other reminiscences of my even'ful life.

Perhaps some of my readers will be surprised to hear me use the word 'eventful' in connection with the life of a rook. We are, I believe, for the most part, regarded as dull, commonplace birds, whose chief avocation is to rear and feed our young, to eat grubs and insects by way of food, and to promote the domestic felicity of mankind by cawing in a homely manner around their mansions. This, however, is a grand mistake, though only one of the many

misapprehensions into which man is led by his selfish and overbearing vanity. The real truth is that the world was made for rooks, and not for man, and that although the greater strength and destructive skill of the latter give him at the present moment an advantage over our noble race, those who believe in the great and immutable principles of justice cannot but rest assured that this advantage is but of a temporary character, and that hereafter the rights of rookdom will be triumphantly vindicated, and servile man shall bow and cringe before his feathered superiors. Even now, unwittingly and unwillingly, they minister to our necessities. Why do they plough the ground with so much care save to expose to our hungry beaks the animal food in which we delight? Why do they plant trees whose maturity will not be witnessed by their own eyes, but by those of the generations to come? Is it not that we rooks may have places in which to build our nests in safety? And do they not, moreover, show us constant marks of respect by planting boys as guards of honour in their fields, who by shouts of 'away crow!' by discharges of antiquated firearms incapable of injuring anything but the gunner himself, and by fantastic displays of strangely attired figures on sticks, serve to show how much our presence is feared, if not appreciated, by the human race? Thoughts upon all these subjects have frequently occupied my mind, and although my race may be depressed at present, in the dim vista of the future I picture to myself a free, a great, and a glorious rookdom. But to my story.

After the breeding season had been finished, and

the youth of our rookery (alas! sadly diminished in numbers by the events which I have narrated) had learnt to use their wings with tolerable facility, they were required to make themselves perfect in flying under the able tuition of several experienced rooks, who held their classes in the immediate vicinity of the rookery. There was the soaring class, the object of which was to teach young rooks to fly as high as they could, balancing themselves upon their wings like a hawk at a distance from the earth which rendered them secure from human attack. There was the wheeling class, by which we were instructed to wheel about, swing round shortly, and accommodate ourselves to the necessities of a windy day. There was the vocal class, instruction in which was generally carried on by an old rook perched upon a dead branch on the top of a tree, whence he cawed vehemently to us youngsters seated below. To this class I belonged, and it was there that I acquired that clear and ringing caw for which I have long been famous. Then there was the shifting class, which taught us when flying steadily in our course, to swerve hastily aside so as to avoid any danger from below. And many other lessons did we learn during the last weeks of our youthful rookery life. But the time came when all these juvenile exercises terminated, and we youngsters were sent abroad into the wide world to get our own living.

Ah me! you children of human parents, who are tended and cared for in early youth, whose growing years are watched with affectionate solicitude by your parents, who enjoy the blessings of maternal love, and perhaps for much of your life are guided by the kind

expression of a father's will, little do ye know of the loveless, uncertain career of a youthful rook. I do not complain. Mine is not an envious nature. But when I think of your condition and of my own, my heart swells within my breast, my feathers ruffle, and I feel as wicked as a carrion crow. Little of parental care had I! A parting peck from my mother was all the token of affection which I received on quitting the scenes of my early youth. But my heart was stout, my confidence great, my feathers glossy, my beak yellow, and my spirit unsubdued; so, with the determination to do my duty as an honest rook, I left the home of my ancestors, and went forth to do battle with the world.

I fear I should but weary my readers, if I were to chronicle the events of ordinary every-day rook-life. They would not care to hear how I occupied my time in searching for the food with which to support my existence, in travelling with my comrades from place to place, always, when it was possible, returning to the same roosting-trees at night, and occasionally in sitting upon favourite branches with clusters of fellow-rooks, cawing to them and they to me in friendly if not melodious accents. I prefer to pass on to those occurrences of my life which may be considered more than ordinary, and may perhaps interest or amuse the thoughtful peruser of my history.

It was upon a bright morning in January that I experienced my first real misfortune since quitting my early home. I had been sitting for some time upon the top of a high elm tree, cawing cheerfully to myself, and looking down upon a world white with a frozen

mantle. The ground was covered with a thin coating of snow, which had fallen during the night, and which now crackled beneath the feet of the walkers with the crispness of the frost. The sun was bright, and the frost melted wherever his rays came full upon it, but the air was cold, and apparently we were likely to have a continuance of hard weather. I had been musing over the various changes of temperature which we rooks boldly encounter with precisely the same clothing, whilst men and women, poor things, change their garments according to the seasons, which to my mind affords another evidence of their inferiority to our noble race.

Whilst thinking over this, it came into my head that there was one thing common to us all, namely, hunger, and that this same feeling was gradually stealing over me to such a degree as to make breakfast a most desirable event in anticipation. With this thought came another which somewhat troubled me. Where and how should I find my breakfast on this particular morning? The fields were hard with frost; no farm-yard was close at hand, and I hardly knew where to look for food. Fortunately I recollected that in flying over a neighbouring wood the day before, I had observed a number of pheasants eagerly feeding in a certain track which I knew I could easily find again. I argued with myself that what a pheasant could eat would be equally wholesome for a rook, and that the best course which I could pursue would be to proceed at once to the spot. Accordingly I shook my wings, rose from the tree, and with a parting caw, sailed away through the cold air, gaining additional appetite as I flew.

I found the wood, and the track, without much difficulty, and before settling down in it, took the precaution of perching in the branches of a neighbouring oak, in order to make sure that the coast was clear. No human being was in sight; the pheasants were feeding quietly in their accustomed place, and I saw with delight that their food was maize, large, delicious-looking grains of which lay plentifully scattered upon the ground. As numerous cock pheasants were making their breakfast near my tree, and I knew cock pheasants to be birds who are occasionally of a selfish nature, I deemed it best to alight at a respectful distance from them, in order to avoid the possibility of a quarrel. Accordingly, I flew some little way along the track, and then settled upon a spot where the maize was not so thickly scattered, but where there was still an ample supply for my wants. Being remarkably hungry that morning, I did not scruple to feed heartily upon this wholesome food, and, hopping along as I picked up the grain, I found myself near the hedge which separated the wood from a field. The maize appeared to have been strewn right up to the hedge, and observing that there was plenty of it at one particular spot, I hopped rapidly on thither. What was my horror at hearing a sudden 'click,' and almost before I heard it, to feel the snow-clad leaves rise up beneath my feet and the sharp fangs of a steel trap close around one of my unhappy legs! At the same instant the horrible truth flashed upon me. Either some poacher, or a rascally keeper who wished to trap his master's pheasants, had spread maize close up to the hedge in order to entice the birds, and where

the maize was thickest had craftily placed a trap, carefully concealed by dry leaves artfully laid upon it. Miserable wretch that I was, I had unwarily hopped upon this hidden engine of destruction, and in all probability should pay the penalty with my life!

For the first moment or two I was so stupified by the suddenness of the misfortune into which I had fallen that I remained perfectly dumb. Then, as a racking pain shot through my poor leg, I gave vent to a caw of agony which attracted the attention of all the birds near me. The hen pheasants began to scurry away into the thick underwood, the cock birds stared at me with amazement, let fall several unkind remarks about thieves coming to no good, and stalked slowly away from the place as if it was no business of theirs at all. A blackbird or two answered my cries with a sympathising chuckle, and a robin red-breast calmly regarded me with a pitying eye from the twig of a hazel-tree on which he was perched. But none offered to help me—no kindly claw was outstretched to aid—no pitying beak opened to comfort me, and, to make matters worse, several jays came flying at once from other parts of the wood, screeching and laughing over my head as if my agony was the best joke in the world.

I had sense enough to know that it would be the height of folly to continue to cry out, for I should by this means certainly attract the attention of some keeper or labourer in the fields, who might very possibly put an end to my pain and my life together if he found me in the trap. Therefore I tried to bear the pain as well as I could, and waited perfectly

quiet for at least half an hour. Then I thought I could bear it no longer, and I began to peck the trap with frantic energy, by which means I hurt my own beak without doing the slightest good. Luckily for me—if I can call that 'luck' which, after all, was only a mitigation of a cruel misfortune, the trap had sprung so quickly together, or I had trod so lightly, that I was caught very little above the claw. Had it been otherwise, indeed, and had I sunk so far as to have been caught by the thigh, nothing could have saved me from an agonising death, and this story would never have been written. My leg, however, just above the claw, was nearly cut in two, so you may suppose that the pain was not slight. I was in great doubt what to do, and in dreadful fear of what might happen next, when I heard a little rustling sound near me, and turning my head, perceived a squirrel seated upon a branch of the tree above my head. Uncertain of his intentions, I cast a piteous look towards the little animal, but said nothing. After a moment's silence, however, he accosted me in a friendly tone of voice.

'Why, gossip rook,' said he, 'you have fallen into a scrape, I fear.'

'Scrape, indeed, squirrel,' cawed I sorrowfully, 'and one that I know not how to get out of. Woe betide the day that ever I saw this wood!'

'Cheer up, friend, cheer up,' replied Pug; 'the wood is not a bad wood after all, if it were not for the keepers and their traps, and the pheasants which tempt the poachers. Can nothing be done to help you?'

These words of kindness cheered my failing heart and revived my drooping courage.

'Oh *do* come down and try, Pug,' said I. 'Look at my poor leg and see what can be done!'

Thus implored, the worthy squirrel ran nimbly down from his seat and squatted close to the trap which he regarded closely.

'Ugh!' he exclaimed at last, 'the nasty, cruel thing! I wish the fellow who set it had his finger in it, that I do! But,' he added, 'I fear there is only one chance for you, friend rook. You must leave your foot behind and lose a limb to save a life, as the saying is.'

As he spoke, telling me in truth that which my own instinct had already suggested to me as my only chance of escape, I felt that he was right. The only thing was, how could I bear the pain which it would cost me to tear myself away from the fangs of the cruel machine which held me like a vice?

Oh ye men and boys, whoever ye be, who chance to read this history, just think for a moment of the misery you inflict upon poor birds and beasts, if ye set or allow to be set in your woods and shrubberies these horrible steel traps. The traps you set for little birds are of a different nature. Three bricks and a tile, supported by a small bit of stick which rests on a twig balanced on another bit of stick thrust into the ground, constitute a trap, into which, if a small bird is fool enough to hop after your crumbs, he richly deserves to be caught. Then, however, he has no pain to endure except reflections upon his own folly, until you take him out and deal with him as

you will. But a steel trap is a shameful and wicked invention, for whatever animal it may be set, and one the use of which nothing can justify. It is generally set overnight, and after setting it, the trapper goes quietly to his bed until the next morning. But the unhappy animal who may chance to set his foot in the trap, very likely within an hour or two of its having been set, is kept in agony all night long—perhaps far into the morning, until either death from pain or exhaustion puts an end to his sufferings, or his captor comes lazily along to see the result of his trapping, and ruthlessly knocks the captive on the head or wrings his neck. No bird or beast, say I, can ever have done mankind harm enough to justify such cruelty as is inflicted by these steel traps, and you will all allow that I speak feelingly.

The squirrel had hardly given me his opinion, when I heard the voice of a man calling to a dog on the other side of the wood. Probably it was the keeper, but whether it was so or not, it warned me that I had no time to lose, and that the effort for freedom must be made. Accordingly I gave a tremendous flutter and tried to rise from the ground. Never shall I forget the intense agony of that moment. It seemed as if all my limbs were being torn from my body—my heart beat as if it would burst—a film seemed to come over my eyes, and I as nearly as possible fainted away.

'Courage, brave bird!' shouted the excellent squirrel in my ear; 'one more such effort and you are saved!'

I heard him, but could not muster strength for

another attempt until a minute or two had elapsed. Then, much nearer than before, the sounds of a human voice reached my ear and awakened me to life again. With another flutter I rose from the ground, a sharp pang ran through my right leg right up into my body, and my whole leg seemed to have been left behind as I rose a free bird from the ground. It was not so, however. My leg was left me, but my foot, severed at the ankle, remained in the trap, and I fluttered with only one foot on to the top of the hedge, and sat there ready to die with pain and exhaustion. The good little squirrel watched me with the greatest interest and gave me such words of comfort and encouragement as he had at his command. As, however, he did not feel over and above secure in the immediate neighbourhood of man, he scuttled away over the dry leaves as fast as he could when he heard footsteps drawing near. From my post in the hedge I observed a man in a black velveteen coat, thick trowsers and gaiters, with a stick in his hand, come slowly along the track, followed by a black retriever. He stopped when he came near the hedge and stood looking at the trap which my struggles had dragged from beneath the leaves.

'Drat them poachers!' he exclaimed after a moment, 'they're at it again—that rascal Bailey set that trap, I'll be bound. Pretty bold, too, right inside our wood;' and stooping down he took the trap up in his hand and examined it. 'Well,' he presently continued, 'no pheasant for him this time, at all events. Nothing but a rook's foot, and that's more than he'll get,' and so saying, he opened the teeth, let my poor foot

fall on the ground, and taking the trap and the chain by which it had been fastened in the ground, walked away with them, muttering to himself as he went in a manner by no means complimentary to the trap-setter.

I felt a small glimmering of satisfaction when I found that the fiend who had been the cause of my misfortune had lost his trap, but this feeling was far overbalanced by the sense of the great loss which I had sustained. Not to dwell longer upon so painful a subject, I may as well say, without further particulars, that after I had rested for a time sufficient to recover my strength, I betook myself to the abode of one of those owls who had studied the art of surgery, and having been successfully treated by this skilful practitioner, was enabled, after a short time, to resume my daily pursuits. But for a long while I felt great inconvenience from the loss of my foot, and even to this very day I find it wearisome work to be obliged to stand on one leg continually. I declare it is worse than always harping on one idea or invariably telling the same story. I have known people who do both the one and the other, but then *they* have this advantage, that they only bore others, whilst standing on one leg bores oneself to a great extent.

After this adventure, you may well believe that I was exceedingly careful in my search for food, and indeed in all my proceedings. There was always a good deal of danger to be apprehended from mankind especially at particular seasons of the year. One of the worst—perhaps I ought to say the very worst—of

these I found to be the time which ought to be the happiest time for all created beings: I mean Christmas-tide. It would be happy enough for birds and beasts, in spite of occasional frost and snow, but for the doings of the monster Man. On 'Boxing Day,' as they call it, and indeed on sundry other days, as far as I could ever make out, half the men and boys run about with guns in their hands, which they use in the most reckless manner. I do not think that they pursue any particular kind of game, but, as the saying is, 'all is fish that comes to their net.' I do not suppose that a pheasant or a partridge would be spared by these gunners if they came upon such birds in their wanderings, but they are satisfied with birds of much less importance. Sparrows, robins, tomtits, and all such small fry they pursue with as much eagerness as if their lives depended upon the success of their enterprise. A lark mounting slowly in the air with his joyful song, affords a fair mark for their aim, though to kill anything when flying is rather beyond their skill. But a blackbird in a hawthorn hedge is a grand prize for them, and I have seen the would-be sportsmen follow such a bird from hedge to hedge with a perseverance and enthusiasm worthy of a better cause. These people are a great nuisance to an honest rook who has his living to get, and plenty to do to find food for himself when the ground is covered with frost and snow.

I remember on one occasion I had flown down with some mates of mine into a sheep-fold, where the animals had trodden away the snow to a considerable extent, and we thought we had a good chance of

picking up something for dinner. There was a hedge not far off, and along this same hedge came several of these Christmas sportsmen, on the look-out for anything they could find to shoot at. I was pecking away very quietly, with several of my companions near me, and sheep scattered here and there all round about us. Presently I thought I would perch on the back of one of these animals, where there is frequently food to be found, and I followed the bent of my inclination in doing so.

Of course I fancied I was quite safe, although the gunners were tolerably near. I knew that the sheep would be my protector; and, moreover, the weather was so intensely cold and my hunger so great that I cared less for possible danger than perhaps was prudent. Anyhow, neither I nor any rook in his senses could have expected what followed. From the hedge about thirty yards off, one of the younger of the sportsmen took a deliberate pot-shot at me whilst I sat on the top of the sheep! Fortunately for me, this class of sportsmen are not addicted to hitting the object at which they aim, or it might have gone hard with me. He hit the sheep, however, and the poor animal, astonished at this unexpected treatment, bounded up so suddenly that I was forced to fly off, which I did without delay. From the gestures and voices of the men I found that the reckless youth who had fired at a bird among the sheep got at least a good scolding for his pains, but this would have availed me but little had I been struck by his shot as he intended.

The wood-pigeons were a source of considerable

annoyance to us rooks at this time; and, for the matter of that, they are so still. They have always had a habit of flocking together in the winter time, and descending in large flights upon the turnip-fields, or anywhere else where they imagine that food is to be found. Of course no one objects to a wood-pigeon getting his own living like any other fellow. 'Live and let live' is an excellent old adage, and I would be the last rook in the world to caw a note against another bird of a different species who was only doing his duty to himself and his family.

But it was not only always the case (as I have found to my cost more than once) that in severe winters, when the quantity of food was insufficient, the proceedings of these wood-pigeons in congregating in such large numbers, materially clashed with rook interests, but they were also productive of very serious consequences. Farmers and others, who could bear with equanimity the presence of a few rooks, were inspired with fury at the devastations of the other birds, and were moreover possessed with the idea (which I am bound to own that experience is said to have justified) that the flesh of a wood-pigeon, roast or baked in a pie, was exceedingly good eating. The result not unnaturally was that wherever these birds assembled, we used to have gunners after them, hiding behind hedges and stalking their victims over turnip-fields until no place was safe. True, these men were generally a better class of sportsmen than the Christmas gunners of whom I have already made mention. They scorned small birds, and were, moreover, not such despicably bad shots as the others. Still, you know, a man with a gun in his

hand is *never* to be trusted. He may be of a naturally cruel disposition and fond of killing for killing's sake; he may be ignorant of the nature and character of rooks; he may be short-sighted, and mistake a rook, flying in the sun, for a pigeon; he may be in want of a bird to serve as a scarecrow, or indeed, even if none of these things chance to be the case, he may be a good shot, fond of showing his skill, and if a rook or any other bird comes over him as a somewhat difficult shot, he may fire upon it, in no particularly cruel spirit, but just to try his skill, to 'keep his hand in,' and to prove his prowess, without once casting a thought to the pain and misery he may thus inflict upon an innocent and friendly bird.

One of my dearest friends fell a victim to a sportsman of this kind. He was returning home, I suppose, from some shooting excursion, on a windy day, and at the corner of an avenue of trees, a number of rooks, among whom was my lamented Glossy-back, whirled high in the air above his head with no suspicion of evil for a moment. The man was, I suppose, struck with the eccentric nature of their flight, and the difficulty which it would present to an unskilful sportsman, and desirous of indicating his own reputation (which nobody had attacked) fired right and left at the poor birds without the slightest provocation, and my poor Glossy-back and another fell wounded to the ground. The hard-hearted monster who had performed this barbarous deed merely smiled a self-satisfied smile at his success, and then walked calmly homewards without bestowing another look or thought upon his unhappy victims. I happened myself to be among

143936

the crowd of rooks present at this sad occurrence. We were all much frightened at the report of the double shot, and when we ascertained the cause, and the extent of our loss, we were terribly embittered against the perpetrator of so nefarious a deed. Were *no* mortal men, then, to be trusted? Could not even a sportsman, returning from the pursuit of his legitimate prey, withhold himself from attacking birds who had never harmed him, and whose flesh, at all events at that particular season of the year, was neither delicate to the palate nor nutritious to the internal organisation of man? Was there no remedy against these hard-hearted oppressors?

We ruffled our feathers with intense anger, and cawed forth our indignation in vociferous tones upon the neighbouring trees. But, after a short time, anger against those who were beyond the reach of our puny vengeance gave way to deep, heartfelt sorrow for the lamented dead. I may as well tell you that Glossy-back, the friend and companion of my middle-age, had been a deservedly popular bird, of singular purity and amiability of disposition, and in fact the very light and life of the rookery to which I belonged. This circumstance, coupled with the peculiarly tragic nature of his fate, induced some of us to determine upon giving him and his fellow-victim a public funeral.

The idea had hardly been broached before it was eagerly accepted by the whole of rookdom. Hard by the old rookery there was a large plantation, which, from its shape and formation, I should imagine to have been formerly a large pond or lake. It sloped away downwards from each side, forming a large, long

basin, and tall trees grew in and around it, whilst the brushwood was very slight and straggling. Here, time out of mind, the bodies of the best and most illustrious of our race had been deposited, when they had been fortunate enough to die near home, and to escape the worthless hands of those who would have devoted their carcasses to the melancholy and degrading use of serving as a scarecrow to keep others of their kind from the newly-sown corn.

It was in this sacred spot that we resolved to place those two noble birds who had fallen in the manner which I have related. No trouble or expense was to be spared on this occasion. Rooks were summoned from every quarter, and attended in large quantities: crows came up from the sea-shore to join the troop of mourners; myriads of starlings assembled to witness the sad ceremony, and even the saucy jackdaws sent a strong contingent of their noisy tribe, who were singularly quiet and well-behaved on the occasion.

But I think what touched us most was the presence of the two old ravens who had inhabited the tall fir-trees for many nesting seasons past, and were popularly believed to be 'as old as the hills.' How old that may be I have never been able to ascertain with accuracy, but I have no doubt that, as a well-conducted and sober raven is said to live for several centuries, and there are grave doubts about the necessity of such a bird ever dying at all save by mischance or murder, these two birds were of a very great age indeed. Struck with pleasure indeed were we rooks when the two venerable creatures came to pay this tribute to departed worth, and sat with melancholy croak upon the dead branches

of an oak hard by. Then and there we vowed friendship for the future with birds who had shown themselves to be of so feeling and kind-hearted a disposition, and every rook there present felt, I venture to say, an increase of his own self-respect when he saw how his race was honoured by this attention of the larger and stronger bird whose claim to the chieftainship of the rook and crow tribe has been generally admitted. So pleased and proud are we all of a little attention bestowed upon us by those of high birth and position, and so much is Rank respected even in our great Rook Republic.

When the mournful ceremony was concluded, and we had all departed upon our several occupations, I found myself overwhelmed with sadness on thinking over the friend I had lost. I could tell you many incidents that had occurred to us both, but that, to my mind, friendship is too sweet and solemn a thing to parade before the public eye. Suffice it to say that I was never so perfectly happy as when alone with Glossy-back. He shared my joys; I poured out my sorrows into his friendly ear; we had no secrets from each other, and felt a mutual happiness in helping each other in our journey through life. Oh, what is there to equal such a friendship as this? I have known and loved more than one female rook in my time, and found pleasure in ladies' society all my life. But I have ever found them more or less fitful and changeable, their tempers often uncertain and variable, and their disposition generally capricious. The longer I live the more I become convinced that in a deep, true, heart-exchanging friendship with a

rook of my own sex the only secure and trustworthy happiness is to be found. Such indeed was my relationship with my beloved Glossy-back, and to think that the hearts which had been thus knitted together by such a bond should have been disunited by the cruel hand of death was a misery which made me half inclined to terminate my own existence. No more might I roam abroad with my friend of friends, searching the fields together for our food, racing together in the high wind, or sitting side by side upon the tall elms, cawing over the state of the world in general and rookdom in particular. No more might we unfold to each other the legends of old days of which educated rooks are so fond, or prophesy the future history of the world which we saw daily progressing around us. All this was past, and on my solitary roosting-tree that night I passed a miserable time indeed, looking round with sleepless eyes for my lost friend—alas! in vain! but hardly able to realise that he was not by me, or falling asleep only to dream of him and to wake again to the sad consciousness of my terrible loss.

My life became a perfect blank. My food palled upon me; I refused corn—neglected insects—grubs became positively distasteful to my feeble appetite, and I avoided the favourite feeding-grounds upon which my beloved Glossy-back and I had so often fed together. No occupation could take my thoughts from the past; as for pleasure, I hated the very word, and day succeeded day without bringing to me any solace whatever. Under these distressing circumstances my health visibly suffered. My eyes

ran with tears; I felt a constant chill through my breast and under my wings, and several of my tail feathers dropped out, to my great disfigurement. My friends strove in vain to arouse me from this state of dejection.

'Be a rook!' they cried; 'it is unworthy for such a bird as you are to give way in such a manner to this inordinate affection and regret. Your friend—and *our* friend—was indeed an estimable, nay, a noble bird; but there are others who love you well—even some connected with you by the ties of blood, which *he* was *not*, and you owe it to them to give way no longer.'

Alas! how little did these would-be comforters know of the rook-heart and its workings! One cannot love by law and rule, and I had given my whole heart to Glossy-back, and could not replace him at the bidding of duty, if duty it was to do so. However, as I had my own reasons for not wishing to die, to which consummation my grief was rapidly tending, I at length made a gigantic effort, and so far rallied from my grief as to seek consolation in literature. I had always been a great reader, and I found it possible to resume some of those studies which in my later years and during the period of my heart-sufficing, life-engrossing friendship I had somewhat neglected. I read Long-beak's 'History of Rookdom,' Grub-lover's 'Man a necessary Evil,' Follow-plough's 'Grubs and how to get them,' and a variety of pamphlets bearing on social questions, and exposing the rapacity, tyranny, and cruelty of mankind, at the same time pointing out the noble and excellent

qualities of rooks in general, and the happy future of dominion over all other creatures which certainly awaits our race. Then, wishing to vary my studies, and to drown my still ever-present sorrow by greater intellectual exertions, I became a contributor to the 'Rookery Magazine;' and thus it was that I was induced to write the account of my life and adventures which I have just been able to give you.

If anything which I have said should prove beneficial to young and inexperienced rooks, just about to enter a life, of the sorrows and vicissitudes of which they may gather some knowledge by my experience, I shall be amply rewarded for the trouble which I have taken; and I can only conclude by saying that I hope they will be of opinion that in the course of my passage through life I have done nothing to deteriorate from the position which I occupy as a rook of good family and position, nothing which could lower the dignity of rookdom; above all, nothing which might be deemed unworthy of the friend of Glossy-back!

III.

THE SILVER FAIRIES.

IT was an old piece of furniture—a very old piece of furniture, and it stood in an old house, too. Nobody knew when that house had been built, or how long it had stood in the corner of the dark dismal London street of which it was certainly the principal mansion. You had only to look at it, however, to be certain that it had occupied its position for a very great number of years, and that if age could make houses respectable, it had reached the very climax of respectability. But, like other respectable creatures, it had its reverses of fortune, and at the time of which we write it was being ransacked and trodden down by a motley tribe of persons hardly so respectable as itself, who had come to witness that desecration of an ancient building and dismemberment of its internal arrangements which are popularly known as a sale by auction. Ah! what a melancholy thing is that self-same transaction, when household gods are scattered to the winds, and objects which have been the hallowed treasures of a happy home are exposed to the gaze of the vulgar herd, and chaffered for by greasy and disreputable bidders. Not that all bidders are of necessity either disreputable or greasy, but that such characters not unfrequently preponderate

at a metropolitan auction. Anyhow, there were plenty of such present upon the occasion of the sale of old Mr. Titledeeds' effects in the aforesaid house, and great was the competition for the books and china sold that day. For Mr. Titledeeds, an eminent lawyer lately deceased, had left behind him a reputation which would have filled the house of any man who left directions that his property should be disposed of by auction. He was reputed to have been a first-rate judge of china, and his collection of old books and manuscripts was supposed to be of great value. So when his legal subtlety failed any longer to defeat the great suitor Death, and the final verdict had been given against him, after vainly attempting to obtain a decree of 'ne exeat' against his breath, he yielded it up, without a 'demurrer,' and having nobody to whom he cared to bequeath his property, directed that everything should be sold by auction and the proceeds divided among certain charities for which he had never shown the least predilection or sympathy during his lifetime. Then the undertaker executed a writ of 'habeas corpus' upon his carcase, and Mr. Titledeeds was known no more upon earth.

Hence it came to pass that the sale took place in the old house, and that on the appointed day a numerous crowd attended, and a brisk competition ensued for the books and china. Nobody thought much of the furniture.

The tables, of strange and antique fashion and of unwieldy dimensions, fetched comparatively nothing. The chairs went for an old song, and wardrobes, beds, and chests of drawers realised but little. And when

the strange old piece of furniture the technical name of which I am utterly unable to give, was put up by the auctioneer, it attracted but very little attention. It was made of oak, had strange knobs of brass about it where you would least have expected them, and it stood upon four large wooden claws by way of feet. It opened towards you, and thus formed a flat desk at which you could write, with large drawers below, whilst the upper part opposite you as you sat writing was a combination of drawers and pigeon-holes more easy to be imagined than described.

I don't know what possessed old Simon Ricketts with an idea that he should like to become the owner of this strange piece of furniture: nevertheless he had the idea, and eventually, as will be seen, he had the furniture too. Simon Ricketts was a milkman in a large way of business, and as honest as milkmen usually are. He never watered his milk when he could supply his customers all round without it, though as his customers were many, and his supply of milk limited, he felt himself occasionally bound to strain his conscience rather than disappoint his friends. He paid his debts when he had money to do so, and sought credit when he hadn't. The latter, however, was not his ordinary condition, for close attention to business and a thrifty habit of life had enabled Simon to save a little capital, and he was beginning to feel rather above the world. Still, he had no idea of giving up his trade, at which he still laboured, though he allowed himself somewhat more holidays than when his means were smaller and his labours necessarily greater.

It is well-known to persons who have considered the subject that there is no question the correct answer to which is more entirely a matter of opinion than what is the best way to spend a holiday. Different people have different ideas upon this important subject. Some like a trip to the sea-side. 'A happy day at Rosherville' has its attractions for others; while there are those who firmly believe no other enjoyment to be equal to that of sitting still with your hands in your pockets, doing absolutely nothing. None of these, however, would have suited Simon Ricketts, whose great delight upon his leisure days was to frequent public auctions. There was something fascinating to him in all the circumstances attending such transactions. The pleasure and privilege of being able to walk into somebody else's house and wander all over it as if you were its master, were highly valued by Simon, although enjoyed in common with the rest of the world. He loved to look over all the lots, to scrutinise the china as if he knew all about it, to gaze upon the pictures as if he were an artist born and bred, and to wonder what various articles would fetch of the cost and value of which he knew absolutely nothing. Then, the proceedings of the auctioneer were of enormous interest to Simon, and he would watch the biddings for each article as it was put up, with a gravity and attention which one would hardly have expected from a person in his condition of life.

Upon this occasion Simon had been no less eager and attentive than usual. He had seen the old port-wine (so well known among those friends of the de-

parted Titledeeds who had been fortunate enough to be upon his dining-list) knocked down at fabulous prices, he had marked the eager competition which took place over rare bits of china, and probably had been somewhat astonished at the sums which certain lovers of the same had given for the specimens upon which they had set their affections. Still Simon Ricketts spoke never a word, and joined in no bidding, for wine and china were not in his line of business, and the money bid seemed to him altogether too much for consumeable commodities or brittle articles. But his ears pricked up when the auctioneer came to the furniture.

By this time some of the most ardent bidders had taken their departure, and among those who remained the competition appeared less earnest and vehement. Therefore it was that the furniture did not bring much, and, as I have already said, tables went cheap, chairs fetched a mere nothing, and much well-made furniture, being of a style and pattern somewhat out of date, was sold at a bargain for the purchaser. So convinced was shrewd Simon of this fact, that he now and then ventured upon a 'bid' for some article which appeared to him to be going for a figure much below its real value. But the professional brokers, among whom were sundry men with hooked noses and keen eyes who seemed to understand one another pretty well, would not let Simon buy when he wished to do so. They overbid him each time, and one or two of them indulged in sarcastic observations upon his personal appearance which were little calculated to flatter the

pride or self-respect of the worthy milkman. At last, however, the old piece of furniture already mentioned was put up, and pronounced at once by those present to be an antiquated affair, only fit for the lumber-room. Some one bid a sovereign, another followed with a bid of five-and-twenty shillings, and amid some laughing and chaffing, the article was run up to thirty-seven shillings and sixpence, and the auctioneer, lifting his hammer and his voice at the same time, exclaimed,

'Now then, gentlemen, only thirty-seven shillings offered for this valuable lot—why, its age surely entitles it to more respect—will *nobody* give me another bid? If there's no advance I don't dwell upon it. No one else? Going! going!'

The hammer was upon the point of descending, when a solemn voice exclaimed in deliberate tones, 'Five pounds.'

Everybody pricked up his ears immediately, and the knowing ones fancied for a moment that Simon was either an artful old dodger who had discovered the worth of the article in question to be greater than was apparent to a casual observer, or that he was some one so utterly unversed in the art of bidding at auction sales, that he might serve as an object for their amusement, and be run up a few pounds more for an article to which he had taken a fancy. But their second thoughts induced them to change their minds, and one and all came to the conclusion that the old man, being angry at having been outbidden in all his previous attempts, had determined to run them up by way of revenge, feeling sure that they would outbid him now as before. From this point of

view their obvious policy was to let the poor fellow fall into his own trap, and become the possessor of the lot in question for more than double the sum already offered for it by themselves. So, being possessed by this exceedingly clever idea, they forbore from bidding, and joined in a hearty laugh when the old piece of furniture was presently knocked down to the worthy milkman. This was exactly what Simon had expected and wished, and having thus obtained the article upon which he had strangely set his heart, he quietly withdrew from the auction room, and having paid for his new possession, made the necessary arrangements for its transfer to his own house.

Now the dwelling of Simon was in no very fashionable situation, nor was it one in any way remarkable for its size, architecture, or general convenience. It was more than a cottage certainly, but hardly to be called a large house, and, in fact, there was nothing comfortable about it, outside or inside, excepting in two rooms—the kitchen, and Simon's own particular Den, beyond that necessary apartment. Simon Ricketts was a widower. Although he had had several children born to him, none remained to cheer his fireside or comfort his old age. His eldest boy had gone to sea, and had not been heard of for many years; his only other son, who had been a railway signalman, had died, some said of a broken heart a few months after his dismissal on account of an accident, the occurrence of which had been attributed to his wicked (though scarce extraordinary) conduct in going to sleep at his post, after having been thirty-six hours on duty at a stretch. Simon's daughters, too

had not been entirely satisfactory to him, having, with one exception, declined to be reared, and resolutely died in their infancy. The exception was Polly—pretty Polly Ricketts, who might have been called 'the apple of her father's eye,' though somewhat of a crab-apple, perhaps, from a natural sourness of disposition, until she mortally offended her affectionate parent, first by running away with a journeyman baker, and then by dying before there had been time for a family reconciliation. However, as the baker made what atonement he could by shortly afterwards dying also, Simon bore up, and not only so, but took home the infant daughter whom Polly left behind, and brought her up in his own house.

At the time of our story, little Dorothy Matson—or Dolly, as she was generally called—was about seventeen years old, and, both in appearance and behaviour, did great credit to old Martha Pattison, who had presided over Simon's establishment, ever since his wife's death, in the capacity of housekeeper and general manager of everything about the premises, Simon himself excepted. Nobody could manage him, and nobody tried to do so. He went his own way, and liked everybody else to go theirs, as long as they did not clash with him. Martha took care not to do this, and as she was a near relation to his departed wife, the arrangement answered well enough both for father and daughter.

Old Simon was not a hard man to live with, provided nobody went into his Den, and this was what nobody dared to do unless specially invited. The Den, as I have already said, was entered by a door

from the kitchen, which was itself rather a large, comfortable room, and served Dolly and old Martha for their usual sitting-room, the parlour being seldom used, but kept as a state apartment into which visitors out of the ordinary run might be shown. Those who were fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to have obtained access to Simon's Den, wondered what the old man could find therein to make him so fond of it, as he certainly was. It was lighted by a sky-light, and consequently somewhat ill-ventilated, as the sky-lights of that locality were not constructed with a view to the admission of air. It was therefore less pleasant to the nose than might otherwise have been the case, whilst dust and dirt were by no means strangers; and the broom of the housemaid being almost unknown, there existed in every corner of the little room that which worthy Martha designated a 'dreadful litter;' a carpet, or rather the pieces of what had been a carpet in its earlier days, covered the floor; the walls might, or might not, have been originally papered, for age, dirt, and inattention had combined to discolour them to a degree which made it exceedingly difficult to determine what their condition might formerly have been. In short, the appearance of the little room was not prepossessing to the fastidious stranger, but to Simon Ricketts it was Paradise. The Den had one redeeming feature, the chimney never smoked; this, however, could not be said of Simon, who loved to sit in his old arm-chair opposite the bright little fire which Mrs. Pattison's care provided for him, and to find solace in his pipe after his day's work.

I am not sure but that it was during one of these evening sittings that the idea came into his head that there might with advantage be more furniture in the Den. There was a large recess on one side of the room, into which different boxes, packing-cases, and various other articles had from time to time been cast, but which could well have accommodated a respectable piece of furniture. So thought Simon as he sat and smoked; and hence it probably arose that when he entered the house in which the sale was going on, and cast his eyes upon the article which forms the subject of our story, the recess in his little Den rose before his mind, and he began to think how the one would fit into the other. Be this as it may, the result was, as we have seen, that old Simon became the purchaser of the piece of furniture, which was duly conveyed to his house, and actually fitted into the recess, after the boxes had been banished, just as if it had been made for it.

Old Simon was uncommonly proud of his new possession. As soon as it had been safely established in the recess, and those who had brought it were well out of the house, he placed himself in front of it and gazed upon it for several minutes with an eye of affection; then he proceeded to examine it more carefully and thoroughly than he had been able to do at the sale. It was certainly very substantially built, for in the days when it had been made, people thought more of strength and durability in their furniture, as well as in their houses, than has since been the custom. Perhaps they were more careless of elegance and classical design than their successors; perhaps ma-

terials were cheaper and more plentiful with them than with us; at any rate, such was the case, and the result was, that Simon found himself the owner of a piece of furniture which would last the length of his own life and a good many more lives if it had decent and proper treatment. He opened it with becoming care, looked into every drawer and pigeon-hole, tapped it in various places where he suspected the possible existence of a secret recess, and felt more and more satisfied with his wisdom in having made so good a purchase.

'Five pounds!' he exclaimed to himself at the conclusion of his investigation: 'Five pounds! why, the thing would have been cheap at double the money! Sour my cream if I haven't done well in buying it, that I have!'

'That you have!' said a voice as Simon concluded his sentence, and it so startled him that he jumped back a yard and a half immediately in the greatest astonishment.

Who had spoken, and from whom did the voice proceed? He looked in front of him; he looked behind; he gazed up at the ceiling and then down upon the floor; he turned first to the right hand and then to the left, but there was nothing whatever to be seen. Yet most assuredly some one had spoken. It could not be fancy, for he was not a fanciful man; he could scarcely attribute the sound to the echo, for there was not, and never had been, any echo in that room since it had first been built—could he have been dreaming, and had he not really heard his own words repeated? Simon stood for several moments wrapt in

mingled astonishment and dread, but as he heard no more and saw nothing, he gradually, though very unwillingly, came to the conclusion that he must have been mistaken, and that the voice had existed only in his imagination. However, he felt somewhat less at his ease for the next few minutes, and during the rest of the afternoon was almost nervous—a thing which he had never been before in all his life. He caught himself looking sharply round over his shoulder now and then, he knew not why, and felt a coldness about the region of the heart which was not usual. Still, nothing happened to alarm him; he took his tea with Martha Pattison and Dolly in the kitchen, as was commonly his practice, and afterwards retreated again to his Den, seated himself in his arm-chair by the fire, lighted his pipe, and began to enjoy himself as an Englishman and a milkman might fairly do. He had not half finished his enjoyment or his pipe, but was proceeding to his entire satisfaction with both, when a strange and novel occurrence turned the whole current of his thoughts and filled him with the most profound astonishment. He had been pondering over cows and calves, cream and milk, curds and whey, and everything connected with the honourable trade of which he had so long been the ornament in that locality. But all such ideas were entirely driven out of his head by the events which suddenly took place.

There was a strange creaking within his new purchase, as if it was greatly troubled in its internal arrangements, and could by no means compose itself into that state of tranquillity which befits an ordinary article of household furniture. When this creaking

(which first attracted Simon's attention) had continued for a short time, the front part of the piece of furniture deliberately opened itself, just as if it had been unfastened by an invisible hand. Immediately afterwards, a low, sweet strain of music broke upon the astonished ears of the old milkman, and from the pigeon-holes (as it seemed to him) there issued a variety of little figures of the most extraordinary character. They were all apparently made of frosted silver, or clad in garments of that metal, which fitted so closely to their bodies as to give the latter the appearance of being really made of the same. As nearly as Simon could judge, his visitors averaged from six to eight inches in height; their figures were all excellently well proportioned; they wore hats of varied and fantastic shape upon their heads, but all of silver also, and the beauty of their general dress and appearance was perfectly marvellous to behold. When as many as twenty or thirty of these little creatures had come down upon the desk which was formed by the opening of the front of their abode, the music struck up a more lively air, and they began to dance.

Simon knew very little about dancing, but he had seen various shows perambulating the streets, in which puppets hopped and skipped about, to the great amusement of children whose parents could be prevailed upon to allow the said shows to stop before their windows. But no dolls of this kind that Simon had ever seen could dance like the little figures now before him. They moved lightly, nimbly, and in perfect time with the music; they twisted themselves about in the strangest and most fantastic attitudes,

but always gracefully, so that it was impossible not to admire them even in their most grotesque postures. The music varied too, in a manner which enabled the performers to exhibit their powers to perfection. Now it was slow and solemn, and the movements followed it faithfully, everyone of them displaying a mixture of dignity and graceful action very pleasant to behold; anon, when the tune was more lively, their motions corresponded with the change, and as it became faster still, more and more animated was the performance of the dancers.

Simon Ricketts, as may be well supposed, gazed upon the scene before him with the greatest astonishment. He had let his pipe fall from his mouth, and leant forward in his arm-chair, with his hands on his knees, staring forward at the strange proceedings which were taking place, and keeping his eyes firmly riveted on the wonderful little beings who had so unexpectedly favoured him with a visit. Like everyone else, Simon had certainly heard of fairies, but his knowledge of them was but very limited, as his life had been one of too practical a character to admit of much enquiry into the existence and habits of such strange beings, and his education had been too much neglected to allow of his having read or studied much, even upon such an important subject. He was very certain, however, that those upon whom he now gazed were no ordinary, every-day creatures, and after the first moment of wonder had passed, the thought crossed his mind that his new purchase might, after all, turn out to have been dear at the money. Suppose it was, as seemed beyond the possibility of a doubt

to be the case, haunted by beings who were more than mortal, how could he tell whether they would be friendly or the reverse to the man who had brought them and their abode from a place to which they were very probably bound by the strong ties of old association? For all he knew, they might bitterly resent their removal, and visit the consequences upon his devoted head.

Simon was not left long in doubt upon the question which he thus asked himself with some trepidation. After their dance had continued for a short time, the music suddenly ceased, when the little figures ranged themselves on each side of the plateau on which they had been performing, and bowed with deep and courteous respect as another figure, very little larger than the biggest of themselves, emerged from the centre pigeon-hole, walked calmly and deliberately down their ranks, carelessly nodding its head right and left, until it reached the end of the desk, when it gave a slight cough, cleared its throat, and was evidently about to address the wonder-struck Simon. This figure was clad, like the rest, entirely in frosted silver, and was only to be distinguished from the others by the circumstance that the cap which it wore upon its head was circled by a broad band of pure gold. Its demeanour was graceful and dignified, and as its dress gave no particular indication of its sex, Simon marvelled whether it was male or female, until it opened its mouth, when the tones of its voice proved to be far softer and sweeter than those which commonly fall to the lot of the rougher portion of created beings. It was evident at once to the old

THE SILVER FAIRIES.

milkman that a Fairy Queen of some sort or other was before him, and he prepared to listen with respectful attention to the communication which she was apparently about to make.

'Simon Ricketts!' she exclaimed, upon which Simon, confused and startled at the somewhat abrupt manner in which the words were uttered, mechanically continued the description of himself as he had seen it upon some parish list: 'Milkman—23 Ebenezer Street—South Road London,—that's me!' he said, as if to assure himself and his visitor of his identity.

The Fairy took no notice of the interruption, but again pronounced the good man's name in a clear and emphatic tone of voice.

'Simon Ricketts! you have fallen in with a piece of good luck, if you only know how to turn it to proper advantage. The old piece of furniture which you bought at the auction has long been the home of my people, the Silver Fairies; we have occupied it for many years, and have no desire to leave it. It is our desire and our habit to assist and bring good-fortune to the families which, from time to time, become the owners of this precious possession. We do not wish to alter our custom in this respect; you and your family will receive the full benefit of our residence within your house, if you treat us with proper respect and consideration; and indeed it is not much that we require of you. Only let us remain quietly where we are, and do not move our home again if you can possibly help it. Whilst we are here, do not let our ears be offended by any bad language, and let not anything dishonest or evil be discussed or performed

in our presence. If you only observe these conditions, you will find the result greatly to your advantage. We will afford you information upon any subject you may desire, we will forward your views, for yourself and relations, in any manner you wish, and we will give you our very best advice whenever you shall think fit to ask it. I hope you will be of opinion that these conditions are as favourable as you could have expected, and that you will readily fall in with our views upon the subject.'

Here the Fairy stopped, and Simon, as he afterwards remarked, felt so flabbergasted, that for a moment or two he could not find his tongue, and therefore remained silent. Presently, however, he somewhat regained his composure, and, as politeness and self-interest both required, made answer to the Silver Lady as well as he could, at the same time scratching his head as if to assist his ideas.

'I bean't no scholard, marm,' he said, 'nor I don't know werry well how I ought to speak to sich as you. But if so be as you means well to I, then I means well to you, and there an't no call to say more as I knows on.' With this answer Simon contented himself, and waited to see if his visitor would be satisfied.

Apparently she was so, for with a pleasant smile and a laugh which you might fairly call silvery, she said, 'I think we understand one another, good Simon. Depend upon it I shall keep my part of the bargain, and mind you do the same. Now, is there anything you want to know, or any service I can render you, before retiring for the night?'

Simon scratched his head again, and then said

solemnly: 'If I bean't too bold: an't you werry cramped in that there old consarn, and if so be as you know so much and can move about so uncommon nicely, why don't you take your pleasure over the whole place instead of boxing yourselves up in a prison like?'

The fairy smiled at this question, but less pleasantly than before. 'Simon,' she replied, '"mind your own business" is a very good rule, and one to which I should strongly advise you to adhere if you mean to do well. Fairies are governed by laws which mortals cannot understand and which it would be impossible for me to explain to you. Moreover, we have a great dislike to being asked questions about ourselves, and invariably refuse to answer. When I asked you just now if there was anything you wanted to know, I referred entirely to matters concerning your own welfare and happiness, upon which I should have been happy to have enlightened you. But, since you have nothing to ask, I will stay here no longer. I may as well tell you, by the bye, the manner in which, during my residence here, you can summon me if you should at any time require my assistance. You must be alone—or at least have no more than one other person, and that a relation—with you, and you must not call upon me before evening, or later than four o'clock in the morning. When you want me, open the piece of furniture, tap three times upon the desk and pronounce the word 'chuck-a-chuck' as distinctly as you can. Either I or one of my attendant fairies will certainly respond to the call if adjured by this mystic expression. And now, fare-

well for the night.' So saying, the fairy kissed her hand gracefully to the old milkman, walked back through the ranks of her followers to the centre pigeon-hole, entered it, and disappeared from sight.

The other fairies speedily followed the example of their queen, all making friendly and respectful bows to the mortal before they retired for the night. When they had all re-entered their pigeon-holes, the desk slowly shut itself up again, and the old piece of furniture resumed its ordinary appearance of quiet though quaint respectability.

When Simon Ricketts found himself alone again he pondered deeply over the scene which had just passed before his eyes, and the words to which his wondering ears had listened. This was the most extraordinary thing that had ever happened to him in the whole course of his existence. He had seen, in his time, many curious things and had known of many queer-looking and strangely-fashioned articles of furniture, but never had he before encountered one which concealed within itself such marvellous inhabitants, nor had he ever believed that such beings as those whom he had that day seen were really the occupants of any place accessible to mortal men. But Simon had always been accustomed to believe his own eyes, and, this being the case, the fact of the existence of the Silver Fairies was no longer a matter of doubt with him. Moreover, being an individual of a practical turn of mind, he at once determined to take what advantage he could of their presence in his house. That presence might certainly be turned to good account. There was no reason to doubt the

ability, and he had been assured by herself of the goodwill of the Fairy Queen to be of service to those with whom her people resided, and the only question in Simon's mind was as to the particular manner in which that service could in his case be best and most efficiently rendered. Over this point he pondered for some time, until it occurred to him that the best thing he could do was to go to bed and sleep over it before coming to any decision. Accordingly, he retired to rest, as the saying is; but alas! there was neither rest nor sleep for worthy Simon that night. Never was mortal milkman in so sleepless a condition. As he lay awake, the events of the evening rose up again and again before him, and the more he closed his eyes the less could he find that oblivion which he would gladly have welcomed. He tossed and turned about, but all to no purpose, the fairy forms still flitted before his vision, the voice of the Fairy Queen still sounded in his ears, and sleep was simply impossible. At last, indeed, he went off into a species of doze, during which he dreamed on the same subject, and awoke with a start, having in his dreams seen at least fifty old pieces of furniture from which emerged hundreds of Silver Fairies, who instantly turned into cats and began lapping up all his fresh cream.

Aroused by this singularly unpleasant vision, Simon slept no more that night, and accordingly felt somewhat tired and unfit for business when the arrival of morning once more awakened his household. He said not one word to Dolly or Mrs. Pattison upon the subject of his extraordinary visitors; but during the whole of that day was remarkably silent and reserved

deeply musing over what had occurred. Towards evening, however, he had pretty well made up his mind that some further steps should be taken in order to realise the advantages promised by the Silver Fairy's residence in his house. So, after much consideration, he joined his granddaughter and housekeeper in the kitchen, and informed them of what had taken place, to which piece of news the former responded by opening her eyes very wide, whilst the latter interrupted the narrator more than once by exclamations of 'My Goodness!' 'Well, I never!' and evinced the greatest surprise and astonishment, which was not unnatural, as Martha Pattison was a plain and homely woman, eminently useful in her sphere of drudgery, but ignorant altogether of fairies and fairyland, having got on perfectly well all her life without either. When the first moments of wonder were over, and Simon had answered, as well as he could, all the questions which were put to him, he solemnly asked the advice of the two women as to the best means of profiting by the presence and goodwill of the Silver Fairies. Upon this point neither of them seemed to have any very definite idea. One thing was very clear. They would certainly be better off in the way of worldly wealth than they had hitherto been. Upon this they were all agreed. Simon, as I have already said, was a well-to-do man; his house was his own, so were his cows, and he had a bit of money put by for a rainy day, as he was wont to say. But nobody yet, that I ever knew, was so well off that he did not think it would be very nice to be a little more so, and although I wish I could have told you that the ladies

of the family took a higher and nobler view, and wished they might all be made better instead of richer, which would have been a very proper and praiseworthy proceeding on their part, yet the truth must be told; and the truth was that the council of three all agreed, first and foremost, that they would certainly ask the fairies to improve their position in the way of worldly substance.

After all, there was nothing very wrong or very extraordinary in such a wish. No one who has ever 'kept house' can be unaware of the fact that bills are things which increase upon you as time goes on, and that one never has quite enough money to settle them without inconvenience. Rates and taxes, too, have an awkward habit of requiring to be paid just when you want to do something else with the cash you happen to be possessed of, and numerous little expenses are always coming upon you when you least expect them. Therefore I hold it to have been not only far from unreasonable, but exceedingly natural, that the object of getting more money should have been one of the first that presented itself to the minds of our friends as desirable of accomplishment.

Even Dolly fell in with this view when seriously put before her by the two elder members of the family conclave, although at first her ideas had rather flown in another direction, and she had imagined her grandfather free from the rheumatics of which he had so often complained of late, Martha relieved of a certain lowness of spirits on which she was wont to dwell much at times, and herself—but I don't think Dolly had arrived at imagining or wishing anything for herself

before the graver and sterner views of the others had been asserted and established as indisputably correct.

Money—more money—was the first and great advantage to be desired from the Silver Fairy's visit. Next came the question, on what scale would she be likely to enrich the family she had thus honoured with her presence? Then came before the eyes of the worthy people visions of the abolition of certain petty economies in their household arrangements, which had always been practised but which might be suffered to pass away without regret.

There might certainly henceforth (if the Fairy were half a Fairy) be meat for dinner every day; the appearance of pudding need not be restricted to Sundays and High Holidays, and Martha might be less chary of the tea when the hour arrived for partaking of that precious beverage. Sundry old and dilapidated articles of furniture might be replaced with new, provided always that the liberality of the Silver Queen sufficed for such extravagance, and I am not sure that the idea did not flit before the minds of the female members of the council, that the papering of one or more of the rooms in the house might possibly be within their reach.

It was abundantly clear, however, that it would be worse than useless to make any definite plans as to the appropriation of the expected addition to their wealth until the amount of such addition had been safely ascertained, and the three accordingly resolved that the first step to be taken was to bring this to a test. They therefore determined to follow the directions given by the Fairy, and having waited until it was

late enough to be undoubtedly evening, they entered Simon's den in a state of nervous anxiety bordering upon fear.

Here, however, the worthy man recollected that only one person, if any, besides himself, was to be present when he summoned his mysterious visitor, and that person must be a relative. Old Martha stoutly insisted upon it that she was quite sufficiently a relative to be admitted into the category of persons qualified under the Fairy's rule. She maintained that the relatives of a man's wife were a man's own relatives, because a man and his wife were one, and it was wicked to maintain the contrary. Moreover, she alleged that her years (though not so many, perhaps, as some people might fancy) and experience made her a more fitting person than Dolly to be present upon such a solemn occasion, and that the latter might find the scene too much for her. In short, Mrs. Pattison pressed the point so warmly, and Dolly was so yielding and sweet-tempered about it, that the old lady had her own way, and entered the den with Simon, while Dolly remained in the kitchen with only just one little sigh of disappointment.

When the door had been shut and there was no longer any reason for delay, the milkman slowly and reverently approached the old piece of furniture, and opened it as he had been directed; then he gave three taps upon the desk, slowly and carefully, at the same time pronouncing the mystic word 'chuck-a-chuck' as distinctly as he was able. But no result followed. All was still and silent save the old clock ticking on the wall, and there was no sign whatever of the existence of anything out of the common way. Again

and again did Simon knock and repeat the word, but nothing happened, and he stood aghast for a moment. Then he turned suddenly to his companion.

'Martha Pattison,' he said, 'there is something wrong here. Hap you bean't a relation after all!'

'Not a relation, good man!' replied that worthy woman in an offended tone: 'Lauk-a-mercy! who could go for to say so! No, no, Simon, *that* ain't the reason, you may depend upon 't. I bean't so sure about this here Fairy of yours, *I* bean't! Now, wasn't you a trying the old Hollands last night, good man? Just say—wasn't you a doing of it? 'Twouldn't no hows amaze me if that was how you come for to see Fairies, and there ain't none here after all! A pack of nonsense you and your Fairies!'

'Hold your tongue, Martha Pattison!' sternly answered Simon; 'this ain't no place nor no time for your tantrums. 'Tis plain to me these Fairies don't hold a man's wife's relations to be the same as his own, and so 'tis Dolly we must have here along with I.'

'A man's wife's relations not his own!' retorted the angry Martha; 'who dares to say such a thing? If that's their ways, drat the Fairies, say I—ah! ah!' and here the good woman broke off into a scream of pain, and began violently rubbing her leg. 'Lack-a-daisy me!' she said, 'something give me such a terrible pinch, sure-ly—oh dear! oh dear! I don't want no more of this, not no ways;' and so saying she turned her back upon the old piece of furniture and made the best of her way out of the room, muttering to herself about fairies and demons in a most dis-

respectful manner, and ever and anon rubbing her leg again as if to get rid of the effects of the mysterious but no less painful pinch.

Then Simon, feeling sure that he was right as to the reason why his first summons had met with no response, called Dolly, and the maiden, nothing loth, came into the den and joined her grandfather. The latter now once more approached the piece of furniture, again tapped deliberately three times upon the desk, and said in as clear and distinct a tone of voice as he could manage, 'Chuck-a-chuck!' The effect was instantaneous. At the mouth of the centre pigeon-hole the Silver Fairy Queen appeared, so suddenly and quickly that both Simon and his granddaughter started back half afraid. The Fairy smiled a pleasant smile upon them, which greatly reassured their doubting hearts, and at once spoke in a sweet and kindly voice. 'What want you, good Simon, and you, my tender maiden, that you thus summon the Silver Fairy?'

Now, although the two mortals knew perfectly well what they wanted and why they had summoned the Fairy, neither of them exactly liked to answer. Dolly, for her part, felt that it was her grandfather's and not her place to speak, seeing that he, as is not unusual with grandfathers, was much older and more experienced than his granddaughter. Simon himself, however, felt some strange kind of compunction at naming such things as money and gold to a being so evidently superior as she who stood before him, and felt quite ashamed and dumb-foundered at having to speak. So, for several moments both of the pair

remained silent, looking alternately at the Fairy Queen and at each other without finding words to speak. Presently the Silver Fairy smiled again, and stamped her foot with just a *little* impatience in the gesture.

'Come, good people,' she said, 'do not keep me waiting here all day. You cannot have summoned me without wanting something, and that something you are not at all likely to get unless you can make up your minds to ask for it!'

Then Simon nudged Dolly, and whispered to her to speak, and Dolly blushed and said, 'Oh no! grandfather, *you* speak!' and a fear came over Simon which made it more difficult than ever for him to find his voice, so he whispered again, 'Go on, Dolly, speak up, wench, I tell ye!'

Upon this Dolly trembled and blushed, and blushed and trembled again, and then made a low curtsey to the Fairy and said in a meek voice: 'Please, my lady, grandfather, and Martha, and I—if we might make so bold—we all thought—we all wanted—if you *would* be so kind—if we *could* have it—if it *might* be done—times are so bad, and there's so much to pay for——' How long Dolly would have gone on stammering out these disjointed sentences will never be known, for when she had got thus far, the Silver Fairy interrupted her with these words:

'You need say no more, my little maiden. I see what it is you have been told to ask for; the old, old story. Your grandfather would be richer than he is—is not that the truth?'

Dolly could only curtsey again, but Simon who was by this time re-assured, especially as the Fairy

had so readily understood what was the object of his desires, now took part in the conversation.

'Sure-ly that's what it is,' he said. 'We don't want nothing out of the way, Marm, so to speak; only if so be as you *can* make things a bit more easy and comfortable, why it *do* seem as if we might as well speak up for to have it done. There's a many expenses in a business like mine, and folks is terrible particlar about their milk now-a-days, they is. Cows be uncertain animals too, they be, and as for them rates and taxes, *they* be certain enough, sure-ly, reg'lar as clock-work and no mistake but what one must pay 'em. So we'd make bold to ask ——'

'That will do, Simon Ricketts,' here interposed the Fairy. 'I perceive that you are not exempt from the common error of mortals, who invariably believe that riches bring happiness as a matter of course. This, however, is no business of mine. I have but to do as you ask me, so long as it is not beyond my power, and since you desire riches, you shall certainly have them. Open the little drawer below the pigeon-hole upon your extreme left, and you will find what you want. I only trust that you will have no reason to repent the accomplishment of your wishes.' With these words the Silver Fairy waved her hand gracefully in the air and forthwith disappeared, leaving Dolly and her grandfather standing where they were.

They looked at each other for a moment without speaking, and then the old man stepped forward, and without more ado opened the drawer which the Fairy had pointed out. Scarcely had he done so when he started back in amazement. It was perfectly full of

new, crisp bank-notes, looking as if they had just come from the Bank, and so closely packed that the amount of wealth which they represented was evidently considerable. With trembling hands Simon began to remove the treasure from the drawer, and as he did so, to his intense surprise and delight, found that the bulk appeared still undiminished, so that apparently he had here an inexhaustible supply of wealth, beyond anything which he had ever hoped for in his wildest dreams. He bade Dolly call Martha Pattison in, and at the sight of such riches the old lady actually forgot her grievances and went off into a series of exclamations which betokened her joy and astonishment.

'Oh my!' she cried. 'Did anybody ever? Lauks-a-mercy! God bless the King and all the Royal Family! Goodness gracious me! I never did!' and with many other interjaculations of a similarly incoherent character did the worthy dame proceed to disclose the emotions of her soul.

Dolly was overwhelmed also. I cannot say what visions floated before her eyes as regards the future, but of course she felt that there would be some change in the whole order of their lives, consequent upon this transition from comparative poverty to unheard-of wealth, and probably she was somewhat more doubtful and uncertain about the matter than her elders. For Dolly was young, and youth does not as a rule set its affections upon wealth, at all events in the same way that it is loved by those who have left their young days and young feelings behind them. She was glad for her grandfather's sake, but I doubt whether her personal gratification was intense, and perhaps if the

matter had been left to her decision she might have asked something different from the powerful friend who had proved so ready and so able to do what was required.

It is impossible to say how long Simon would have stood there fingering his newly acquired riches if at last his granddaughter had not called his attention to the lateness of the hour. It was long past his usual bed-time, and rest is as necessary to an old milkman as to anybody else. Moreover, after a short time given to considering how and where he should stow away his treasure, he came to the conclusion that it would be far better to leave it where it was, and take out notes from the drawer as he might require them from time to time. So he stowed away those which he had already taken out, to the value of several hundreds of pounds, in another drawer, then closed the treasure-drawer carefully, shut the desk, and left the old piece of furniture to its former condition. After this ceremony had been performed, the three members of Simon's family separated for the night, each of them to get what sleep might be possible after the strangely exciting events of the evening.

The next morning dawned brightly upon the little household, and they assembled at the breakfast-table with a feeling that a new state of existence was about to open up before them. Simon conversed with greater freedom than was his wont during the repast, and was not above consulting both Martha Pattison and Dolly as to the best method of employing that wealth of which he had so unexpectedly become the possessor. All agreed that the milk business should

at once be abandoned; and it was curious to see how many objections to the trade, which had never been spoken of in the family before, had all along been entertained by the various members thereof.

It was a 'low business altogether,' said Martha; 'terrible wearing at times,' remarked Simon himself; and even Dolly observed that there were great anxieties connected with the uncertainty of the supply at times, and the complaints made by some people of the quality of the article supplied. It turned out that Simon had never liked it, that Martha had always thought it a degrading employment, and Dolly had often wished that her grandfather lived in the country and had some more agreeable occupation. So from that morning the old-established firm of Simon Ricketts and Co. (though the Co. only existed in imagination) was summarily dissolved, and the stream of milk from that quarter ceased to flow.

But although to relinquish one occupation was comparatively easy, it was a different matter altogether to select another. Simon had reached a certain age, at which men cannot learn a new business, and if he had possessed the greatest talent for doing so, he would hardly have been able to bring himself to select one rather than another, being perfectly ignorant of all. There was of course the alternative of remaining idle for the rest of his life, and living, as he expressed it, 'like a gentleman;' but to this he felt scarcely equal. To a man who had worked all his life idleness would be anything but agreeable, and of this fact Simon was quite clever enough to be aware. So the three talked matters over for some time with-

out being able to decide what course would be most likely to promote their happiness. Dolly suggested that her grandfather might keep a shop—a large shop with beautiful plate glass windows and occupying some good position in the town. He might employ himself with the accounts and general management of the business, whilst she and Martha Pattison could serve the customers, which they would be able to do better than the proprietor himself. It might be a haberdasher's shop, or even a milliner's and dress-maker's, for they would have plenty of money to hire attendants who understood the business, and there would be a great deal of amusement to be got out of it.

Martha Pattison, however, saw things in a different light. What was the use of troubling to keep a shop, she wisely remarked, if, as was the case with Simon, you had got money enough to live without it? Better by half hire a nice house in a fashionable part of the town, and take lodgers, which was a genteel as well as fashionable occupation. She, Martha, could manage the cooking, Dolly could look after the house, and as for Simon he could amuse himself in any way he liked.

This plan, however, did not commend itself to the old milkman any more than the other, and he already began to experience the difficulty of having more money than he knew what to do with, which is a difficulty in which no one believes who has not had the opportunity of trying it. So the three good people talked matters over during the whole of breakfast-time without coming to any conclusion, until at last a bright thought dawned upon the master of the house-

hold, and striking his hand forcibly upon his knee, he exclaimed with emphatic vehemence, 'Dash my wig if I don't ask Joe Muggins!'

The person thus referred to was one of considerable importance in the estimation of his neighbours as well as his own. Joe Muggins kept the public house at the corner of the street, and, what is more, managed to make the public house keep him. He was a knowing man in all matters of sport, from horse-racing down to rat-killing, and was moreover consulted by many of his acquaintance upon affairs of a totally different character. For Joe had an air of wisdom about him which went a long way of itself towards the establishment of a reputation for knowledge beyond that possessed by the average of mankind. He had not unfrequently a pipe in his mouth, and when he removed this for the purpose of giving his opinion, in pithy and oracular words, upon the business which might be in hand, his appearance and manner were most impressive, and seldom failed to carry conviction to the bystanders.

Now Simon Ricketts was not what is called 'a public-house man.' He preferred smoking his pipe in his own den, and choosing his own company when he wanted any company at all. But inasmuch as Joe Muggins could not be expected to visit him in a snug and confidential manner unless he occasionally joined the party at the 'Royal George,' Simon used as a matter of duty to frequent that place of entertainment from time to time, and drink in with contented ears the instructive remarks which fell from the lips of the oracle. The latter had on his part a great respect for

Simon Ricketts, whose appearance in his parlour did good to the house and was always hailed with satisfaction by the respectable company therein assembled.

Therefore, the proposition to consult Joe Muggins was one hardly unexpected by Dolly and Martha Pattison, and they readily gave in their adhesion to a plan to which they knew well enough that resistance would be useless. True, family affairs were better kept within the family circle, but a man like Joe Muggins was not to be found every day, and in a matter of such immense importance it was certainly very desirable that the best possible advice should be taken. However, as a discussion upon money matters is always one of considerable delicacy, it was obvious that the one in question could not with propriety be carried on in the parlour of the 'Royal George,' where a certain amount of publicity would be unavoidable. It was therefore determined by the family conclave that a formal and pressing invitation should at once be sent to the redoubtable publican to drop in that evening, with an intimation that business of an important and particular nature would be brought under his notice.

On receiving the message Joe Muggins, as was his wont when moved, took a deep draught of his favourite ale, followed by a sigh which shook his mighty frame, and then gave a nod of assent which implied at once that he would not only be there at the appointed time, but would be prepared to give his whole attention to the matter, whatever it might be, and was perfectly conscious of the enormous importance of his doing so. Thus assured of the counsel of which he stood so much in need, Simon got through the rest of the day as well

as he could; looking through old accounts, contemptuously throwing aside unpaid bills of doubtful customers whom it would never be worth his while to dun now, and wondering to himself how he could ever have taken the trouble with his trade which but a few hours ago had appeared so necessary and had indeed produced to him such good results.

For, had not Simon been an industrious and hard-working man, he would never have saved up money enough to justify his relaxing his efforts in the afternoon of life; had not those efforts been relaxed he would have had no time for roving about, and now and then attending sales by auction; and had he not so attended, he would never have fallen in with the old piece of furniture, never heard of the Silver Fairy, and, worse than all, as a natural consequence, this veracious story would never have been written. The labour of his past life, however, seemed to Simon to have been somewhat useless, seeing that in a moment of good fortune he had apparently stumbled upon a means of amassing wealth far more easily, and in fact without any labour at all.

And such is the perversity of human nature, that instead of being filled with gratitude at the luck which had befallen him and the happy prospect before him, I am afraid that Simon cast back thoughts of regret to the long years of life spent in toil and labour, and felt injured because he had not discovered the Silver Fairy at an earlier period of existence, when he had youth and vigour to enjoy her bounties in a greater degree and for a longer time than he could now hope for. He passed, as I say, a good part of that day in look-

ing over old bills and accounts, and then he sauntered forth into the streets and took a long walk. Still, time hung heavy on his hands, and this first day of riches seemed to the old milkman by far the longest and dullest day he had ever passed. At last, to his great satisfaction, evening came, and, true to his time, the faithful Joe Muggins appeared, and took his seat by the fireside, filled his pipe, gazed contentedly upon the large tumbler of strong liquor which was dutifully placed at his right hand, and prepared to deal, wisely and well, with whatever matters might be brought before him.

Simon seated himself exactly opposite his guest, and having settled comfortably down in his arm-chair, and seen that his womankind were in a proper attitude of respectful attention, began his narrative. With most accurate regard to every detail, he related all that had occurred, from the first moment of his having quitted his house for a saunter in the direction of the sale at old Lawyer Titledeeds' mansion down to the final appearance of the bank-notes in the little drawer. He omitted not a single circumstance and added nothing, but told the simple truth in his own way, and kept his eyes steadily fixed upon his guest and neighbour as he did so. The latter listened gravely, his large saucer eyes opening more and more widely as his friend proceeded, but never a word spake he during the recital of the marvellous history, and when it was finally concluded, he still maintained for some moments a deep and solemn silence, as though the matter was not one to be lightly dealt with, or upon which an opinion should be hastily given.

Presently, however, Joe Muggins roused himself to action. He slowly and with much deliberation removed his pipe from his mouth; then he carefully laid it upon the table near him; next, he solemnly lifted the tumbler to his lips and took a deep draught of the beverage which it contained; then, drawing from his capacious pocket a large red handkerchief, he leisurely unfolded it upon his knee, and proceeded to wipe his lips with the gravity of a man who feels that he is performing an important act; this done, he placed a hand upon each knee, bending forward in order to do so, and staring Simon Ricketts full in the face. He cleared his throat twice before he spoke, and having by this time apparently made up his mind and found his voice, propounded his views upon the subject in the following momentous words:

'Be a Parliament-man,' and, having thus spoken, maintained his position for some minutes, steadily staring at his friend as if to mark the full and exact effect produced by his words.

Simon was for the moment completely taken aback. The oracle had spoken and had certainly changed the whole scope and current of his ideas. He had thought and pondered over many possible occupations, but amongst them all, that of a member of Parliament had certainly never been included. Indeed, the worthy milkman had no very clear and definite ideas upon the subject of the duties of a representative of the people. He had some vague notion that the position must be one of value, judging from the eagerness with which it was sought after by the candidates at an election. Moreover, from newspaper reports and public-house gossip, he fancied that the posses-

sion of a drawer containing an inexhaustible supply of bank-notes might greatly facilitate his obtaining that position to which he was now advised to aspire.

But, excepting that members of Parliament had to live in London half the year, and make laws—that they talked a great deal in doing so, and that their proceedings took up a great deal of space in the newspapers which might otherwise be filled with more amusing matter, Simon knew very little about them. The worthy man was no politician, and, in fact, generally followed the lead of Joe Muggins at an election, together with the other frequenters of the 'Royal George' parlour, with no very definite idea as to the political party which he was supporting. It was therefore an extraordinary idea to him that he should suddenly be invited to become a prominent actor in the arena of politics, and a proposition so strange and unexpected almost took his breath away at the first moment.

So he stared back at his sapient adviser without uttering a word, and for some few seconds the two men sat there gazing at each other with grave countenances in a manner which would have appeared somewhat ridiculous to a stranger. Not so, however, did it seem to the females of the party, who had been eagerly waiting to hear the opinion of the great oracle, and who, now that it had been given, were puzzled and astonished beyond measure. As to Dolly, Parliament being in her mind intimately connected with that species of ginger-bread which goes by the same name, she at first imagined that her grandfather was advised to start a shop in that line of business, which indeed would

furnish him with some kind of occupation, though why and wherefore it should be more desirable than his present employment was hard to discover.

Martha Pattison, however, had more accurate notions upon the subject. Being a staunch church-woman and fond of her prayer-book, she had very frequently studied the Prayer for the High Court of Parliament therein contained, and from its expressions had been led to the belief that members of Parliament were a grave, reverend, conscientious body of men, whose only wish and object was to deliberate and take counsel together to promote everything which was right, to support religion, discourage vice, pass good laws for everybody's benefit, and generally advance the safety, honour, and welfare of our sovereign and her dominions, and establish truth, justice, religion, and piety amongst us for all generations. That Simon should ever belong to such a body appeared to Mrs. Pattison something almost unattainable, but the glory of attaining thereto would be great indeed, and of a surety Joe Muggins would never have proposed it had it not been possible. So it came about that, after the two men had gazed earnestly at each other for a certain time, as if the extraordinary wisdom of the one and the marvellous increase in the worldly importance of the other had inspired a mutual reverence and awe which could scarcely find expression in words, the female portion of the company were the first to break the silence.

'Oh deary me, Simon!' exclaimed Martha in an earnest tone of voice, as if fully conscious of the solemnity of the occasion: 'Oh deary me! To

think of you amongst all them wise people in the Parliament House! I'd never have thought of it myself, but Mr. Muggins—*he* knows—and why and wherefore not I should like to know? Oh, he *do* know a lot, Mr. Muggins! Just hear him!' And Martha clasped her hands and raised them before her in a supplicating attitude as if appealing to the world at large to bear testimony to the knowledge and sagacity of the immortal Muggins.

Dolly, solely ejaculating the words 'Oh la!' sat still and wondered greatly, whilst, at the conclusion of Martha's address, Simon opened his mouth and spoke, scratching his head at the same time as if thereby to give greater force to his words.

'I bean't rightly sure,' he began, 'whether I be standing on my head or my heels;' a remark which, taken by itself, showed but small appreciation of his own position, seeing that he was comfortably seated in an arm-chair by his fireside, and not standing at all. 'It seems all curious like,' he continued, scratching his head with greater vigour, 'and I can't make it out nohows. How be I to get made Parliament man, neighbour?' and here Simon stopped scratching and again stared at Joe Muggins with the air of a man who had propounded a question difficult of answer.

But Muggins was equal to the occasion. Without altering his position or indulging in explanations of unnecessary length, he simply remarked: 'Beer: jaw: them notes;' by which it is to be feared that the astute publican intended to convey the intimation that by the bestowal upon the enlightened electors of malt-

liquor, oratory, and money, the object which he had proposed to Simon might be attained.

This answer had the effect of making the old milkman still more confused, and he applied to his guest for further and fuller information upon the subject under discussion. A conversation thereupon ensued, the particulars of which it would be difficult to give. Suffice it to say that the advantages of becoming a member of Parliament were so clearly pointed out by the publican that all three of the family party became convinced that nothing could be better or more desirable for Simon under his altered circumstances. It is possible that the fact of a general election being about to take place had suggested the idea to the excellent Joe Muggins; but, be this as it may, the existence of this particular crisis seemed to offer a tempting opportunity for the successful accomplishment of the design. It was therefore determined that the matter should be brought before the frequenters of the 'Royal George' the very next night; that, without mentioning how or from whence it came, it should be stated that Simon Ricketts had come into a good bit of money, and that his readiness to represent his fellow-citizens in Parliament on the strength thereof should be duly set before them.

Accordingly, the host of the 'Royal George' took measures to secure as large a party as possible for the following evening, hinting in a mysterious manner that something of uncommon importance was in the wind. His room was well filled, and at the proper moment Joe Muggins introduced the subject of the election, hinted at the desirability of their being

represented by one of themselves, and forthwith placed before the company the fact of Simon Ricketts being able and ready to undertake the task.

The announcement was received with great satisfaction by the assembled party. So ignorant were they of the dignity which surrounds Englishmen in the discharge of the sacred duty of electing men to represent them in Parliament, that their notion of the proceeding went little further than the belief that it presented an opportunity more than usually favourable for eating and drinking at somebody else's expense, and perchance pocketing a certain amount of cash in consideration of recording their votes in favour of a particular person. No sooner, therefore, did they find Simon able and ready to pay for the privilege of becoming a Member of Parliament than they eagerly adopted him as their candidate, and pledged themselves then and there to do all in their power to promote his election. One or two of them there were, indeed, who said that they should like a statement of Simon's views upon some of the great questions of the day, but they were soon put down as troublesome meddlers, and it having been ascertained that the candidate was really in possession of plenty of cash, he was received with open arms by the electors present, and the very next morning 'Ricketts and Independence' might be seen placarded over every wall in the vicinity of the 'Royal George.'

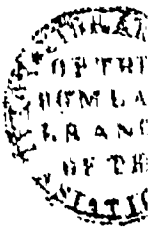
That same evening good Simon found it necessary to have recourse to the drawer again. It never struck him that he might as well have asked the Silver Fairy's advice as to the step he was about to take,

for so impressed was he with the unbounded wisdom of Joe Muggins that he required no further counsel after having taken that worthy's opinion. So when the evening had arrived he retired to his den, opened the piece of furniture and extracted from the treasure-drawer a goodly supply of notes, after which he proceeded to indulge in his usual pipe, and dozed over it according to habit.

Presently there fell upon his ears the same creaking sound which he had heard before, but which did not now surprise him as on the previous occasion. He was not surprised, either, when the same low, sweet strains of music broke upon his sense of hearing, and through his half-opened eyes he saw the piece of furniture open and the graceful forms of the Silver Fairies come forth. They seemed, however, to dance more sedately and with less spirit and animation than at the time of their first visit, and ere long they stood still as if by common consent, and a voice sang, in soft and subdued, yet clear tones, a song which sounded strangely to the old man's wondering ears :—

'It chanced upon a summer's day
The sparrow longed to be a pheasant,
And thought to strut in plumage gay
Could ne'er be anything but pleasant.
What joy! his earnest prayer was heard,
His homely feathers soon rejected,
And, in his new attire, the bird
Could ne'er as sparrow be detected.
But summer passed away, and then
Advancing months gave thoughts more sober
Of dogs and guns, and sporting men,
Who bid a welcome to October.

Our sparrow now would fain return
To feathers brown and former station,
But meets, alas! refusal stern
And vainly asks for transmutation.
The hour arrives—he mounts—he flies,
And vainly like a sparrow twitters,
He falls; proclaiming as he dies—
"Alas! all is not gold that glitters!"'



At the conclusion of these words the voice stopped, and after a brief space of time, during which the music sounded somewhat mournfully, the Silver Fairies retired, and the piece of furniture shut itself as usual.

Simon could not understand it at all. For one moment an uncomfortable doubt stole over his mind whether the allegory of the sparrow in pheasant's feathers was not intended to signify himself and his new aspirations; but after a moment's thought, he rejected the idea, or at all events put it aside as one too unlikely to be seriously entertained. Nothing, indeed, could at this period have shaken his confidence in Joe Muggins, or his conviction that he had done well in the choice which he had made of an accession of wealth in preference to any other gift which the Fairy could have bestowed. In fact he felt supremely happy and contented. For, although those good and wise people are doubtless perfectly right who tell us that riches do not constitute happiness, yet so long as the perversity of human nature leads people to fancy the contrary to be the case, those who find themselves suddenly elevated from comparative poverty to unbounded affluence cannot be prevented from feeling just as happy as if the

aforesaid good and wise people were entirely wrong. Wherefore not only did Simon at this time wear a look of contentment upon his rugged features such as it was pleasant to behold, but the generally unprepossessing countenance of good Martha Pattison positively beamed with exultation, and even Dolly, who was always cheerful and lighthearted, appeared, if possible, more so than usual. Their happiness, therefore, was not checked or interrupted by the song which Simon had heard, nor indeed am I sure that he deemed it worth while to say anything about it to the others.

It is needless to relate the occurrences of the following week. The wisdom of Joe Muggins was completely proved, as far as the result to himself was concerned. The 'Royal George' never before drove such a roaring trade. Beer flowed like water, Simon Ricketts grew immensely popular, and the drawer of bank-notes had to be repeatedly opened. Once or twice Simon heard the strains of fairy music at night, and they sounded more mournful than when they had first fallen upon his ears, but he was too much occupied with other thoughts to take much notice of them now, and as he was constantly from home until bed-time, he heard them less than he would have done under ordinary circumstances.

All appeared to go prosperously with his new plan. There were, indeed, some people who opposed his election, and expressed their opinion that a member of Parliament should be a person of some political education and, if possible, of experience. These, however, were but few in comparison with those who

took a larger and more enlightened view of the subject. It was sufficient for them that their candidate should be a man with a stake in the country, and Simon's stake was evidently so considerable that his fitness could not be doubted for a moment. And so it came about that, when the election came on, without having made a single intelligible speech or propounded a single political opinion beyond the broad statement that he thought public-houses should be kept open as long as people liked to drink in them, and was otherwise generally in favour of supporting the British Constitution in Church and State, Simon Ricketts was triumphantly elected a member of Parliament.

Great were the rejoicings that followed, more beer was consumed, more notes were taken out of the drawer, and joy and exultation filled the heart of the female members of the family. The worthy milkman, however, was not long before he began to find out that he had entered upon a state of life very different from that to which he had hitherto been accustomed. Even when dressed in his best Sunday clothes and smartened up under the careful eye of Martha Pattison, he hardly felt easy in the new society which he had entered. The company was not altogether so select as he had been used to believe before he had become one of them himself, and being a man of much natural acuteness, he soon found out that a man did not necessarily become a gentleman either in tone, manners, or education, as soon as he became a member of Parliament. Then they kept very bad hours, and Simon, who had habitually sought

his bed about nine o'clock, by no means approved of having to sit up until one or two in the morning.

To his untaught mind, moreover, many of the speeches made appeared very useless and unnecessarily long, and he could not understand why the House of Commons, though it occasionally stopped an orator by clamouring him down with undignified shouts, had no regular method by which it could prevent its time being wasted, and put an end to fruitless discussions and prosy speeches. He was also puzzled to know why the Chairman was called the Speaker, as he spoke less than anybody else, and why he and the clerks at the table before him wore great wigs, when they had plenty of very good hair of their own. The huge mace, too, which hung at the end of the table, was an object which excited the mingled astonishment and reverence of Simon Ricketts, and scarcely less so the court dress and sword of the Serjeant-at-Arms, with awe of whom he was mightily impressed.

The worthy milkman was not altogether unhappy at first: he made great friends with the door-keepers, who, stern and haughty in their demeanour to the outer world, are ever affable and condescending to those who have once passed the sacred threshold and become members of the august assembly whose avenues they guard. Simon found, moreover, an excellent friend in the worthy individual who presided over the corridors in which members hung their coats and deposited their umbrellas, and from him our good friend received many useful hints as to the forms and ways of Parliament. But, somehow or other, he felt

that he was not exactly in his element, and the song of the Fairy, about the sparrow who sighed to become a pheasant, recurred to his mind more than once about this time.

It was not only the actual new life which troubled him. Things did not go on at home quite as smoothly as of old. Martha Pattison—or Mrs. Pattison as she insisted upon being called now—was by no means satisfied that things should remain as they had been when Simon was only a milkman. Their house was in a quarter scarce fashionable enough for a member of Parliament, she said, and the whole style and manner of living of the family ought now to be changed. Simon resolutely set his face against this at first, and declared that nothing should induce him to live differently from the way in which he had so long carried on his existence with tolerable comfort to himself and others. Still he found it difficult to withstand the constant hints—and more than hints—which were dropped by Martha Pattison, whose views upon the subject were very different from those which Simon entertained, and who at last 'capped the climax' by declaring that it was a sin and a shame that Dolly shouldn't go to Court, for 'you couldn't find a better-looking nor a better-behaved girl among the whole boiling of 'em.' She added that the granddaughter of a member of Parliament was in duty bound to pay her respects to Royalty, and Dolly herself, on being appealed to, avowed with many blushes and simpers, that she should dearly like just for once to go and see the Queen and all the fine ladies, if her grandfather saw no particular objection.

Poor Simon was by this time nearly beside himself with the changes which his new position had entailed upon him, and having hitherto withstood the alteration in house and manner of living which had been so pressed upon him, thought he had better make the concession now demanded. Accordingly Dolly Matson had to make those preparations for going to Court which are necessary to all ladies who perform this duty, but which were tenfold more terrible and troublesome to her than to the majority of such fair creatures. For fashionable dresses and fashionable dressmakers were as yet unknown to Dolly, and their acquaintance was not to be made without much trouble. You may depend upon it that Simon had to go to his treasure drawer more than once during the intervening time between his yielding the point and the arrival of the day upon which the wished-for ceremony was to be performed. Dolly, however, fortunately fell into clever hands, and having a figure which it was a pleasure to dress well, was turned out in a most becoming manner for the great occasion.

I suppose there was hardly a nicer-looking girl at the Drawing-room that day, and moreover she had taken such lessons in curtseying as to be quite perfect in the art, provided that she did not lose her nerve upon the first occasion of finding herself face to face with Royalty. What the exact result of that awful moment really was has never been accurately ascertained. All that may here be told is the fact that the day was one of great and sad disappointment. Dolly had formed high expectations of the courteous good-breeding which would be uppermost among those

ladies whose station entitled them to visit their Sovereign, and of the decorous, not to say graceful behaviour which would distinguish the assembly and which she would have to imitate as best she could. Great, then, was her astonishment and dismay at finding the extraordinary difference of the reality from the scene which she had expected.

A crowd of ladies, more or less well-dressed, but if well-bred, ladies who had left their good breeding behind them for the day, jostled each other in the anterooms, pushed, struggled, looked daggers, dropped remarks more cutting than their looks, and positively fought their way almost into the presence of Royalty in a manner which, to the milk-man's granddaughter, appeared anything but dignified, and scarcely respectful to the august lady to whom they had come to do honour. Dolly, after a severe struggle with this ill-behaved throng of her fair sisters, found herself once more in the carriage of the lady who had taken her to the Drawing-room, being the wife of a brother member who had made Simon's acquaintance and had good-naturedly offered to help him out of the difficulty he experienced in finding some one to look after his granddaughter upon that eventful occasion.

The poor girl returned home with her gown half torn off her back, her shoulder scratched by the epaulet of an unscrupulous gentleman in attendance upon some other ladies, and her arm smarting from the savage pinch of a malicious old dowager whose progress towards Royalty she had unwittingly barred. She was dreadfully disappointed at the whole scene and was effectually cured of her Court-going propensity, so

that Simon was exposed to no further requests in the same direction.

By this time, however, he had already begun to weary of his new existence and actually to doubt whether he had been wise in so readily following the advice of the sapient Muggins. It was not only the late hours and the tiresome speeches of which he had to complain, but the innumerable letters which were addressed to him by that large class of persons who think that as soon as a man has been enabled to write M.P. after his name, they have a right to communicate with him upon every conceivable object under the sun and several more into the bargain. Simon Ricketts was pestered with applications for subscriptions, and with so many other requests that he lost all patience with his correspondence, and at last took to the use of strong language whenever a new batch of these troublesome letters was delivered.

Now Simon was not a man habitually given to the use of hard words, and it was only under the pressure of the troubles caused by his new phase of life that he had acquired the habit. But the increase of correspondence and the whirl into which his brain got at last through the multiplicity of changes which had befallen him had really quite confused and bewildered him altogether, and he became liable to fits of rage to which he had never before been accustomed. Several times he wished the letters and their writers all kinds of bad wishes, and this generally occurred when he was seated in his den, into which the letters were always brought.

On one occasion, after having given vent to a

burst of passionate exclamations which cannot with propriety be here inscribed, he had shortly afterwards occasion to go to his treasure drawer, which to his surprise stuck fast, and resisted all his efforts to open it. Dismayed at so unpleasant an occurrence, he sought the advice of his female relations, but even with their assistance failed to open the drawer. He feared, however, to resort to any violent means to do this, lest he should give offence to the Fairies, and determined to wait until next day in hopes that the drawer might be less obstinate.

That same evening it chanced that the House of Commons was not sitting, and Simon smoked a pipe in the den after his old fashion. After a while, the old creaking sound fell again upon his ears, the piece of furniture opened, and the Silver Fairies once more appeared. Mournful, however, was the strain which the music played, and sad were the countenances of the dancers, and presently Simon heard a voice singing words which ran as follows:—

'Where Silver Fairies make their home
And bounteous gifts on men bestow,
No evil thoughts or words may come,
Or gifts and Fairies thence will go.
Warned once again by Elfin rhyme,
Mortal! from evil words forbear,
Lest, banished by thy foolish crime,
The Fairies make their home elsewhere.'

The meaning of these words was easily understood by Simon, who now recollected that the Fairy Queen, when she had appeared to him on the first occasion, had warned him against allowing her to hear bad language whilst she was domiciled in his house. He

was struck at once with a fear of what might be the consequences of his indiscretion, and determined to avoid again falling into an error which might cost him so dear. As yet, indeed, he was uncertain whether or no his drawer of notes was not already permanently closed, and it was with fear and trembling that he once more tried it upon the next morning. To his great joy it opened the same as of old, and was as prolific as ever. Apparently the Fairies had only intended to give him a warning, and this he resolved should not be lost upon him. Therefore, as he found himself quite unable to refrain from occasional violent exclamations directed against the writers of the numerous begging letters which he daily received, he took the wise precaution of having them always placed in the parlour, so that he got over his rage there before proceeding to establish himself in his den.

As time wore on, however, other difficulties cropped up, and among these the first and foremost was the increased determination on the part of his friends to press upon the worthy milkman the absolute necessity of his moving to some larger and more fashionable residence, such as would better become the exalted position which he had been called upon to fill. Of course Martha Pattison was very urgent upon the point, and although Dolly did not press it, there could be but little doubt that the change would be agreeable to her. Poor Simon stood out as long as he could, until at last he was induced to give a reluctant assent to the change. It may be wondered why the good man, in this and his other troubles, never asked the Silver Fairy's advice, and indeed the

answer would be difficult to give. The only thing to be said is that Simon considered that the Fairy Queen, in giving him riches which were apparently unlimited, had done so much for him that he could not decently ask for more, or perhaps he thought that to go for advice would be evidence of a weak and uncertain spirit which he did not wish to give, and might moreover look as if he thought the Silver Fairy had not already dealt with him in a sufficiently liberal manner. Be this as it may, he yielded to the pressure of Martha Pattison and his friends, and allowed a large house to be taken for him in a fashionable part of the town. They could not persuade him, however, to part with his old home, and although strenuously urged to let or sell it, he resolutely refused to do either the one or the other. An old woman was accordingly hired to occupy and look after the premises, and Simon promised himself an occasional visit to the place in which so many of the happiest days of his life had been spent.

The night before the family quitted the old house Simon felt much depressed, and all the joy of Mrs. Pattison and light-hearted conversation of Dolly failed to rouse him even to tolerably good spirits. After the others had retired to rest, he betook himself to his den for the last time—took out a quantity of notes and put them into a small desk in which he generally kept his private papers, and then, throwing himself with a groan into his arm-chair, lit his pipe and tried to smoke away the grief which rose within his breast.

It was in vain. Visions of past days of tranquil enjoyment flitted before him, faces loved and lost

seemed to rise before his eyes, and the contrast between his former state of happy industry and his present condition of idle luxury (for so he deemed it) became indescribably vivid and at the same time painful. Presently when he was between dozing and waking, the old creaking noise came once more from the piece of furniture, which again opened as on previous occasions.

Simon seemed to be unable to rouse himself from the dreamy state of languor into which he had fallen, but yet he saw with sufficient clearness what followed. The music played in a strain more melancholy than ever, and fell upon his ears with so mournful a cadence as to add greatly to the grief which, even in his half-sleep, he felt so acutely. Forth came the little figures, too, as usual, but across the beauteous white of the frosted silver breasts of each a black scarf was thrown, and their whole deportment was one which betokened great and intense sorrow. Very slowly they moved to and fro, and in a voice which seemed agitated by the most profound emotion, the same singer whom Simon had previously heard chanted in a low and grave tone the following verses :—

'Farewell to happy moments past,
Never, ah! never to return!
What happiness on earth may last?
When will mankind true wisdom learn?
Farewell! "Farewell!" oh! cruel word,
From home and friends when forced to part,
What sound more sad is ever heard
To try the fond and faithful heart?
In vain we strive for grateful rest,
We yield to some resistless spell,
And, forced from all we love the best,
Are tortured by that word "Farewell!"'

Simon listened to these words with as much attention as his dozing condition permitted, and felt somewhat uneasy at the tone and manner in which they were sung, as well as at the actual words themselves. Their meaning was not very clear to him, but he supposed that the Silver Fairies, like himself, disliked leaving the old den, and were taking their last farewell of the same, as in fact he himself was doing, though after a different fashion.

In fact, the next day the old piece of furniture, together with such of Simon's other household goods as had not already been moved to the new house, was to be taken thereto, and placed in the room which had been fixed upon for the study of the master of the house. Doubtless, thought Simon, the Fairies knew this as well as he did, and perhaps liked the proposed change little better. However, it was too late to make any alteration in his plans, and therefore he deemed it best to say nothing upon the subject, but, after the scene which has just been described, retired to rest with a heart by no means as light as that with which in old days he had been used to close his evenings after a good day's work and a comfortable pipe at the end of it.

Next morning all was bustle and confusion in the old house, men running to and fro, luggage being moved from one place to another, would-be helpers standing in the way at every corner, idle people looking on, and all the usual preparations going forward for the migration of a family from one house to another. Simon felt more melancholy than ever, but it seemed useless to indulge in such feelings, and

he therefore bore up against them, and went off in a four-wheeled cab to his new home, in company with the female members of his family. They arrived there without accident, and in due time their luggage followed, and amongst other things the old piece of furniture was safely brought, and duly deposited in its destined place.

The room in which it was placed was in great contrast to that from which it had been brought, being of a bright, new appearance, with a smart carpet, fine curtains, furniture just bought, and altogether fitted up as a study fit for so eminent a personage as a member of Parliament. There was no niche into which the old piece of furniture exactly fitted, but as Simon naturally wished to have it near him, it was placed in a corner of the room where it certainly contrasted somewhat strangely with all the new furniture, but still, from its own natural respectability of appearance, was by no means so much out of place as a less substantially built article might have been. Out of place or not, however, there it was deposited, and after a while the rest of good Simon's things were duly arranged and he found himself established in his new home.

As evening drew on, the ex-milkman's depression of spirits returned, and he avowed to Dolly that he didn't like 'these here changes' and had never felt in worse spirits than he did that day. Dolly, poor girl, was not particularly happy herself, for the breaking up of a home, however humble, is not a pleasant business when it comes to the point, and there were many old associations which could not be parted with

entirely without regret. She knew, however, that her grandfather had one source of solace which in old days had never failed him, and advised him accordingly to have recourse to that faithful comforter—his pipe. By no means unwilling to follow this counsel, the old man betook himself to his study, pulled an arm-chair in front of the fire, lighted his pipe and sat down for his first smoke in his grand new home. After a whiff or two, however, he bethought himself that he would take a look at the old piece of furniture in its new position, and just see that everything was right with it. Somehow or other, it did not look to him quite the same as usual. What it was, he could not tell, but certainly there was a difference, just as you may observe in a human being, whose features indeed remain the same, but who sometimes varies extremely in expression according to his or her condition of mind and body. So there seemed, somehow or other, to be an unusual and unaccountable heaviness about the old piece of furniture which struck Simon at once. He rose from his chair, walked to the corner of the room in which stood the article in question, and opened it forthwith. There were the pigeon-holes and drawers exactly the same as usual, and Simon stretched out his hand and opened the treasure drawer which had stood him in such good stead. There was no difficulty, as once before, in his doing this, but when he had done so, dreadful to relate—'the drawer was empty!' Not a note, not a scrap of paper, not a vestige of anything whatever. Empty, positively empty, was the drawer, and the fact was too plain and certain to admit of a

doubt. Simon gave a groan from the very bottom of his heart, and sank into the nearest chair. Visions of ruin passed before his eyes at that moment. Here were his riches apparently swept away in an instant, and what was to become of him he knew not.

Rousing himself, however, by a mighty effort, he determined to ascertain the full extent of his misfortune, and for that purpose proceeded to open every drawer in the piece of furniture, but alas! with exactly the same result. The fountain of bank-notes had evidently dried up, and the wealth of Simon was at an end. One more hope remained: the Fairy might be summoned. Before venturing, however, upon this experiment, the old man thought it best to break the news to his female relations, and accordingly proceeded to the drawing-room, from which they had not yet retired for the night. His strange and haggard appearance struck both the women at once.

'Oh, Grandfather!' cried Dolly, 'what *is* the matter? What *has* happened?'

Then Simon unfolded the tale he had to relate, and the consternation it created may be more easily imagined than described. Both Martha and Dolly agreed that the only hope remaining was to summon the Fairy once more, and as Dolly's presence had been successful upon the last occasion, it was settled that she should go with her grandfather to the study in the present crisis. The two, therefore, marched off to the room without further delay, with the intention of using the means which they had been bidden to employ in order to summon the Silver Fairy when they required her advice. Those means, however,

were not required upon the present occasion. Just as they reached the door of the study a loud noise as of a heavy fall startled both grandfather and granddaughter. They looked at each other for a moment in wonder, and then opened the door.

The cause of the noise was at once apparent. The old piece of furniture had fallen forward upon its face, and lay on the floor smashed and broken, the very wreck and ruin of its former self. Whether impelled by some supernatural power, or animated by some internal feeling not common to furniture in general, it had apparently made a determined effort at self-destruction, and had nearly, if not quite, accomplished its purpose. This, however, was not the only sight which met the eyes of the two persons who entered the room. Standing upon one of the fragments of the broken piece of furniture, and gazing upon the destruction around her with a mournful eye, was a figure which they instantly recognised as the Queen of the Silver Fairies. She looked up as they entered, and fixed her gaze upon the two wondering mortals in silence for a few moments, whilst they stood rooted to the spot with amazement: then she spoke.

'Simon Ricketts!' she said, 'you may well look with wonder and sorrow upon the scene before you, of which, indeed, you yourself have been the cause. When you purchased and brought to your house the ancient, happy home of the Silver Fairies, you received full notice of what you might gain from such guests, and what you should do in order to retain their fortunate presence. Alas! you have followed in the usual track of mankind. Advice you might have

had, which, if obeyed, would have made your life happy—but advice you have never once asked. Impelled by the insatiable desire for wealth which has ruined so many of your race, you demanded riches, and believed that in their acquisition you had obtained everything which mortal man could desire. By this time you have probably discovered your mistake in this respect. But it has not been your only mistake. You were warned not to offend the ears and good taste of the Silver Fairies by language which they dislike, and you required a second warning. Worse still, however, you neglected the more important injunction as to moving our ancient home, and, in spite of warning, you have conveyed it to a new dwelling in which no fairy could remain a single hour. You might have understood that novelty and fashion are things ill-suited to the life of a Silver Fairy. ' You might have known that our home could not exist side by side with the furniture in this room. ' By removing it from your own old home you have sacrificed it and our happiness as well as your own to the inordinate love of riches, and you will now find that the latter have vanished as well, and that you have gained nothing, but lost everything, by the course you have so foolishly adopted.'

As the Silver Fairy spoke these words with a stern voice, poor old Simon felt his heart sink within him. What a prospect lay before him! After a life of comparative prosperity he had risen suddenly to affluence, and now saw himself about to be plunged into hopeless poverty; for the debts which he had incurred since his election, and the expenses of his altered

household, had been such as he could never have hoped to defray save by the assistance of the treasure drawer, and with its loss there seemed nothing before him but utter ruin. This thought, and perhaps in addition some little remorse at having seemed ungrateful to his benefactors the Silver Fairies, cut the old man to the heart. His knees trembled beneath him, his voice would not come at command, and he stood before the old piece of furniture the very picture of hopeless misery. But with Dolly it was happily otherwise. Her loving heart felt more deeply for the blow which had evidently fallen with such severity upon her aged relative than for any possible consequences to herself, and to shield him from harm was her first and only thought at that moment. Throwing herself on her knees before the Fairy Queen, she addressed her in an earnest voice of entreaty.

'Oh *please* don't say such cruel things to grandfather, great Fairy! *Indeed* and *indeed* it wasn't his fault; it was Martha Pattison and I who persuaded him to want more money, and to be grand and great, and to move from the dear old home and come here. Don't let *him* be punished for *our* fault! Oh *please* don't! Just think what an old man he is, and how hard it will be for him to be so poor in his old age! *Do* punish me instead, and let grandfather off!' As she spoke these pleading words, the tears stood in Dolly's eyes, and presently rolled down her cheeks, and she clasped her hands in the intensity of her earnestness.

The Fairy Queen looked upon her and smiled pleasantly.

'Dear child!' she said, 'who could resist such an advocate? Yet there are things beyond the power of even a fairy. A lost home and a broken heart are neither of them things easy to restore, and our home is gone for ever. Still we must not be unjust and punish your grandfather as if he had intentionally done us this evil. Let him look to the notes he placed in his desk last night, and he will find enough to save him from the calamity he dreads. But be wise in time. *Your* old home is not destroyed like the home of the Silver Fairies. Return there—be content—and all may still be well with you.'

She spoke, and as the last words left her mouth her figure became gradually more and more indistinct and presently faded away entirely out of the sight of the two mortals. Her speech, however, had rekindled hope in the bosom of Simon Ricketts. Recovering himself from his state of despondency, he turned to his granddaughter, and having tenderly kissed her, then and there made a solemn vow to get quit of his new house and all its contingent expenses with as little delay as possible, and to return forthwith to his former home, and the old Den. Martha Pattison raised a feeble remonstrance on being informed of this determination, but on finding Simon quite resolved on the change, and warmly supported by his granddaughter, she wisely submitted to that which could not be avoided.

I am glad to say that on examining his desk, Simon found that the notes which he had so luckily stowed away were sufficient to pay off every farthing of debt which he owed, and to leave a balance over

and above which was quite worth having. Ere long, therefore, he was not only back in his old home, but re-engaged in his old trade, having resigned his seat in Parliament, and returned with real pleasure to his cows. In one thing only did he venture to act if not in opposition to, at least quite independently of, the suggestions of the Fairy Queen. He had the old piece of furniture carefully repaired, and placed once more in the recess in the old den which it had formerly occupied. And whenever Simon felt an angry or a covetous thought rising in his heart, he would go and sit down before the old piece of furniture, and as he contemplated it, would call to mind the occurrences with which it had been connected, and forthwith banish from his heart the unworthy guest.

After all, he had no great reason to regret what had happened. He had learnt the great lesson of contentment, and had, at the expense of a short time of trouble and vexation, rather improved his prospect of ending his days comfortably. Things continued to go right with him, and before he died he was generally looked upon as a well-to-do man, and that upon very good grounds, as he had greatly increased his business and had evidently prospered therein. Neither did he leave this world until he had seen his granddaughter happily married to a deserving young farmer who had long looked upon her with loving eyes, and to whom she made an excellent wife when he took her to his country home.

Joe Muggins, after the return of Simon to his old trade, fought rather shy of him at first, fearing to be accused of having been the cause of his loss of wealth.

However, when he found that the worthy milkman felt no regret upon the subject and certainly bore no malice, he gradually came round, dropped in again now and then as in old days, and eventually gave the final proof of his wisdom by taking Martha Pattison for his wife. It is no part of my business to narrate what effect this step had upon the trade of the 'Royal George' or the comfort of its keeper, but I am inclined to believe that Simon Ricketts sorrowed but little at the event. Anyhow, he lived on for several years afterwards without seeming any the worse for it, and probably died none the sooner from the loss. He ended his days peacefully and happily, and there were those that said he had further help and assistance from the same source from whence had come his sudden wealth. This, however, is probably untrue. People who have once banished fairies from their homes are seldom lucky enough to get them there again. They may forgive; they may even leave behind them words of wisdom and good advice by attention to which mortals may thrive and prosper. But seldom if ever do they revisit with their sweet presence the scenes where they have once been happy and have lost their happiness; and whatever ignorant people may have thought and said, I feel very sure that when he left the new study after that important interview with the great queen, Simon Ricketts had taken his last look, for ever and aye, at the Silver Fairies.

MOLLY AND THE DEVIL-FISH.

IV.

THE WITCHES' ISLAND.

IT was raining in torrents: 'raining cats and dogs,' as some people say, though I never knew the exact origin of the saying, and never witnessed the actual and literal occurrence of such an event. Anyhow, however, the great drops fell fast from the dark heavy clouds, and what made it worse was that the wind was blowing so fiercely at the same time, that to hold up an umbrella was simply impossible. A most troublesome wind it was, too, not coming like a respectable wind from any particular quarter, but taking you on all sides as if it had the special privilege of coming from every quarter at once, or of selecting the point from which it could make itself the most disagreeable at any one particular moment.

So Molly Goodchild found it rather difficult to keep dry as she struggled against wind and rain, wrapped her old red cloak round her as closely as she could, clutched more tightly the handle of the covered basket which she was carrying, and made the best of her way along the road by the sea-shore. On a bright, calm summer evening it was pleasant enough to stroll along this road and enjoy the soft breezes from the ocean. But there were no soft breezes now, and as to walking nearer the sea than you could help, it wasn't

to be thought of. The waves were running mountains high and dashing themselves like mad things upon the rocks, scattering their spray far before them as they broke with a crash like thunder. The sea-gulls were flitting like uneasy spirits over the sea, and every now and then uttering a shrill cry which you might take to mean delight, fear, or excitement, whichever you pleased, but which was neither musical to the tender ear nor reassuring to the timid heart.

I don't know much about Molly Goodchild's ear, but her heart was certainly timid, and particularly so upon the evening upon which she is introduced to our notice. For John Goodchild, her husband for ten years past, albeit a sturdy man and well able to earn his living and support his family by following his trade as a fisherman, was unfortunately given to combining other and less lawful pursuits with that legitimate occupation. In those days, smuggling was deemed no great crime by the seafaring population of the coast, and John Goodchild was generally supposed to be one of the gang who had run many cargoes and successfully eluded the vigilance of the Preventive men for a long time.

Nor was rumour so much in the wrong in this particular instance as is frequently the case. John Goodchild was in the thick of the smuggling, sure enough, and a bolder and more fearless fellow could hardly be found. His cottage was handy to the shore, being built into the chalk cliffs which rose like giants from the sea, close to it at one place, then falling back for a hundred yards inland and then jutting out again as if to give the waves something to dash against in high

tides. The road by the sea, therefore, to which I have alluded, was not very straight or very even, and seemed to have been constructed by some one whose object had been to keep as close as possible to the water's edge, but who had been obliged at various places to bore through the cliff or to take a turn some way inland in order to protect his work from the action of the sea.

Molly Goodchild proceeded on her way for some distance until she came to a spot at which the road turned its back altogether on the sea and dived into the cliff as if it had become suddenly tired of the sight of the blue ocean. At the distance of a hundred yards or so it came out again and faced the open air, but the passage from one end to the other was somewhat dark and dismal, and so Molly thought as she paused at the entrance for a moment as if hesitating whether to advance. She did not, however, hesitate long, for fishermen's wives have no time for hesitation, especially when they are hurrying home to prepare their husband's supper, and feel an inward consciousness that they are a good bit behind time. This being the case with worthy Molly, she quickly nerved herself to the task, and plunged boldly into the gloomy passage before her without further delay. As she did so the air struck keen and chill, and she wrapped her cloak still more tightly around her, and shivered withal. She hurried along as fast as she could until she had got about half-way through the passage, when suddenly she stopped as if she had been shot. A voice, soft and gentle, but still a voice, sure enough, although the owner thereof was nowhere visible, whispered into

her ear in perfectly audible tones—'Molly Goodchild!'

Utterly confounded, astonished, and not a little alarmed, the good woman could for an instant say or do nothing. Almost immediately afterwards, another voice in tones as loud as a trumpet calling to battle, shouted her name again, apparently from the farther end of the passage to which she was advancing—'Molly Goodchild!' and with scarcely the interval of a second, another voice sounded in tones equally loud and clear from the entrance which she had left behind her, 'Molly Goodchild!' and immediately afterwards other voices joined in, and the bewildered woman heard the whole place reverberating with the sound of her own name, shouted forth again and again as if it had been a war-cry, or a chorus, or something to which everybody else had a right, instead of being, as she considered it, her own private property.

Under these extraordinary circumstances there was in Mrs. Goodchild's opinion nothing for it but to go on as fast as she could, inasmuch as between voices before, voices behind, and voices on both sides of her, she had not the remotest conception which way any of the speakers wished her to go. So without more ado (though trembling considerably as she did so) she hurried forward again with the utmost possible speed, whilst the same sounds still continued to ring in her ears until she reached the farther end of the passage, and with a sigh of joy came out once more into the open air.

At a little distance from the passage, the road bore upwards and passed between two great masses of rock

on either side of it, which seemed for all the world as if one of the great crags had taken pity on the engineer at that particular spot, and split itself on either side so as to allow his road to run through it without further trouble. But just before it reached this point another road, or rather cart-track, bore away from the main road down towards the sea, and led to the cottage in the cliff which was the abode of the smuggler-fisherman and his wife. When the latter had arrived at this point, she turned off and was about to hurry down to her home, when her attention was suddenly arrested by a loud and discordant laugh which apparently proceeded from the cleft rock immediately before her. . .

Once more she halted, and looked in the direction from whence the sound seemed to come. The sight which met her eyes was by no means calculated to calm her already perturbed spirit. Seated upon the side of the rock, as if it was in a position of extreme comfort and one to which it was daily accustomed, was a gigantic Turbot, surveying her with great complacency, and apparently shaking its fat sides with suppressed laughter.

Molly Goodchild was struck dumb with astonishment. Turbots she had often seen, and, as a fisherman's wife, was well acquainted with their natural habits and usual methods of proceeding. But so large a turbot—so far from the water, and evidently so completely at his ease, Molly had certainly never seen before, and for a moment she stared at him with open mouth, scarcely able to believe her own eyes. *Was* it a turbot? and could it have been from *him* that the

laugh had proceeded? Another moment put the matter beyond a doubt. A second burst of laughter again sounded forth from the rock, and most decidedly it came from the Turbot. His enormous fins positively wagged with the effort, his huge mouth opened and shut as if he were gasping for breath, and it was palpable that he was enjoying himself in a manner which few turbots could have done save indeed in that native element which the fish in question appeared to have left for the time.

Molly knew not what to make of it. The first thought that crossed her mind was one regarding the great size and probable weight of the creature before her, and how much he would fetch in the market, if she only had him there. This thought, however, passed away in a moment, for Molly was far too sensible not to perceive at once that this could be no ordinary turbot. How he came there, what fun he could find in lying on the rocks instead of swimming in the sea as most respectable turbots generally did, and above all, what he meant by laughing in that strange and unaccountable manner, were questions to which the good woman could return no answer, and for a full half-minute she continued to look at the creature without either the will or the power to say a word. Indeed, the Turbot was the first to break the silence, for when he had sufficiently recovered from his fit of laughter, he said, in a wheezy choky kind of voice, such as you might have expected from a fish of his size and corpulence, 'Molly Goodchild! where's your husband?' and having said these words, he went off into another fit of laughter of a kind which

threatened to choke him speedily if it continued much longer.

Molly, however, was by no means disposed to laugh at his words. She had gone off quite early that morning to the neighbouring town in order to make certain purchases of housekeeping necessaries, and, of course, knew nothing of her husband's doings during the day. The laughter of the Turbot, however, at once awakened in her breast the suspicion of evil. For as turbots may be supposed to be naturally hostile to fishermen, it was unlikely that any good luck which might have befallen John Goodchild would have excited the fish in question to the degree of merriment with which he appeared to be possessed. Wherefore the excellent Molly, losing at once any fear which she might have entertained of the strange creature who had accosted her in such an unwonted manner, and feeling only anxiety for the husband whom she had left safe and sound in the morning and whom she was hastening to rejoin, spoke out at once, in answer to the fish, and in a voice somewhat shaken by an undefined dread, gave utterance to the following words:—

'Lack-a-daisy me, Muster Turbot, whatever do you mean? Has anything happened along o' my John? Sure-ly he be at home and ready for his supper, too, bean't he?'

At this response to his question the Turbot positively roared, till great, juicy tears rolled from his eyes, and his whole frame quivered with emotion. Molly knew not what to make of it, or how to proceed under these extraordinary circumstances, and was still

hesitating and wondering, when, with a mighty effort the creature recovered himself, and after a puff or two which were rendered necessary by the great exertion he had undergone, droned out, with as much gravity as he could, the following astounding words :—

'The Fisherman's wife she is gone to the town,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
With her very best bonnet and very best gown,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

The Fisherman sauntereth down to the shore,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
Shall he ever come sauntering back any more ?
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

The Fisherman lieth full length on the beach,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
Loud laugh the fishes, aye ! all and each,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

The witches are watching the crest of each wave,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
Long have they looked for a mortal slave,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

A mortal slave must the witches get,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
To row their boat and to mend their net,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

The Fisherman slumbereth, long and deep,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
Hurra ! for the witches have caught him asleep,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

They have carried him off to their sacred isle,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
Who shall reclaim him by force or guile ?
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !

Vainly his widow her hands may wring,
Hey ho ! sing by the sea !
But loudly the fishes will laugh and sing,
Roar away, waves, and ye winds, blow free !'

As the Turbot came to a conclusion, Molly Goodchild felt a terrible sense of calamity steal over her, and a conviction that the words which she had just heard were certainly true and that her husband was lost to her for ever.

Upon that wild coast there were many strange traditions, and wonderful legends, but none upon which all authorities were more completely agreed than that of the Witches' Island. Who, or what the witches were had never been accurately ascertained; their number was unknown, the extent of their power uncertain, but of their existence none of the inhabitants of the coast entertained the slightest doubt whatever. The island which bore their name was but a few hundred yards from shore, and as nearly as possible in the middle of the large bay close to which the cottage of the Goodchilds was situated. Molly had more than once been in her husband's boat when he had rowed or sailed past this island, and had never at such times remarked anything peculiar about it, or seen any traces of the evil beings who were said to make it their home. But at nights, when the waves were breaking with their heavy, thundering crash upon the rocks, and the winds were whistling around the little cottage, both Molly and her husband had fancied that they heard sounds like human voices borne on the blast from the direction of the island. Sometimes a scream, but more often harsh, discordant laughter, singularly out of place at such an hour and in such a locality, came ringing in the ears of the smuggler-fisherman and his wife, and at such moments they would draw nearer to each other

and closer to the fire, and mutter words of fear and wonder.

More than this, too, sundry of the fishing folk had vowed solemnly that at times they had seen strange weird figures flitting about on the shores of the island, and John Goodchild himself, though never very communicative on such subjects, had more than once dropped hints of having seen more than he cared to mention. Anyhow, both he and the other fishermen of the coast never went nearer to the Witches' Island than they could help, and, indeed, seldom alluded to it in their conversation, recognising it as something which must exist, but with which it was desirable to have as little to do as possible. So when Molly Goodchild heard this strange song sung by such a strange singer, no wonder that terror at once struck chill upon her heart, and she felt sure that some dreadful misfortune had befallen her husband.

As soon as he had finished his song, the Turbot again relapsed into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which, to Molly Goodchild's mind, appeared to be in exceedingly bad taste under the circumstances. Anxiety for her husband being, however, uppermost in her mind, she swallowed the rising wrath which would have prompted her to tell the Turbot pretty plainly what she thought of his conduct, and clasping her hands together in a supplicating attitude, exclaimed in a tone sufficiently pitiful to have melted the heart of any fish that ever swam in the sea, 'Oh please, Mr. Turbot, if anything bad 's happened to my man, *do* tell us what's to be done for, to set things right again!'

'Boil me if I do!' shouted the fish in reply. 'Boil me, and dish me, with lobster sauce into the bargain, if I tell John Goodchild's wife how to get back her husband! No, no—I know a trick worth two of that. The rabbits may do as they please, but no fish that is worth boiling will help a fisherman's wife! Sprats and herrings! the woman must be a fool to ask me!'

'Fool, yourself, you great ugly fish!' cried Molly, now losing her temper. 'Drat your impudence, laughing and grinning at other people's troubles! I don't believe a word you say, and I wish you was cooked and eaten too, that I do!'

At this the Turbot's fins visibly bristled, and he answered in the same tone of voice as before: 'Believe or not, as you please, Molly Goodchild, you will find that the voice of a turbot is as truthful as an angry woman's passion is ridiculous; but, anyhow, you can go and see for yourself!'

The same thought having crossed Mrs. Goodchild's mind while the Turbot was speaking, she had already determined that her best plan was to go home at once and ascertain the truth or falsehood of the tale she had just heard. The instinct of a fisherman's wife was, however, still strong within her, and she could not help thinking how very acceptable a gift the prophet of evil would be to her husband. So, having by this time quite overcome any fear or astonishment which she might have felt at the first moment of hearing a fish laugh and speak, she stepped boldly forward towards the rock on which the creature had placed himself, exclaiming as she did so, 'True enough, Mr. Turbot, I *will* see for myself, and you may as well

come along with me and see too, and why not to market afterwards, I should like to know?'

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, when, as her hand was outstretched towards the rock, it suddenly opened before her, and to her amazement she perceived a stream of water inside the cliff, evidently flowing internally down to the sea. Into this the Turbot, with a hoarse laugh, quietly glided before her very eyes, and in an instant after disappeared, whilst the rock closed behind him, and once more returned to its original condition.

Molly Goodchild opened her eyes wide with astonishment not unmingled with dismay. For the thought crossed her mind that a creature with such power at his command was but too likely to be generally well informed and to have told the truth regarding the fate of her husband. Evidently, however, it was useless to wait any longer by the rock, and therefore without further delay, she hurried down the track which led to her cottage, and entered the latter with a heart full of fear.

'John!' she cried, as she stepped over the threshold of the open door; 'John, my man, where are ye?'

But no voice answered her call, and all within the cottage was still and silent as the grave. It was evident that her husband was not there. She went into the kitchen, but no sound was to be heard save the steady ticking of the clock, a dreary and melancholy sound to an anxious mind, recalling to one as it does the fact that time goes on just the same in our misery as in our happiness, and that it makes very little difference to the progress of the world around

us whether we are cheerful or wretched. Then Molly looked into the little side room in which she and her husband were wont sometimes to sit when the nets were drying in the kitchen, and which was full of the various implements appertaining to the craft of a fisherman. It was untenanted, however, by human being, and her search through the rooms upstairs was equally fruitless. Then she rushed out again on to the beach and down to the sea calling 'John! John!' at the top of her voice. But no John replied, and the wind and waves seemed to mock at her as the one howled round her head and the other crashed upon the beach before her. The full conviction of the truth of the Turbot's story flashed across her mind, and, regardless alike of wind and wave, Molly Goodchild threw herself down upon the beach and burst into a fit of sobbing and crying as if her heart would break.

I do not know how long she would have continued this pleasant occupation, if she had not been sufficiently sensible to be aware that it could do her no possible good, and would in no way contribute to bring back her lost husband. That he *was* lost she had no longer the smallest doubt, and she greatly feared that he had been taken from her in the manner related by the laughing fish. What, then, could she do? Timid as she was in all things concerning the supernatural, yet her love for her husband was stronger than even her fear of the witches, and if anyone would point out to her the way to proceed, she felt that she had within her the courage to do and dare everything to regain her lost one.

So, gathering herself up from the beach, she began, still sobbing as she did so, to ponder over the events of the last hour and run over in her mind everything that had occurred, and every word that had fallen from the Turbot. Suddenly she gave a start, as she remembered one expression which had fallen from that cruel fish, though she had paid little attention to it at the moment. '*The rabbits may do as they please*,' he had said, whilst refusing to assist her in any way with his own advice, and this appeared to give some clue to a means by which, possibly, aid might be obtained. Rabbits abounded in the neighbourhood, and if their agency could in any way be made available, it ought to be procurable without much difficulty.

But, alas! what right had the wife of John Goodchild to expect assistance from the furry any more than from the finny tribe? Had she not often helped her husband to devour a rabbit pudding, and looked on him with happy eyes as he smacked his lips after the dainty bits and the fat slices of bacon with which she had flavoured the favourite dish? Must not every rabbit of common feeling entertain a grudge against those who could thus rejoice in feeding upon his kind, and had she any right to expect favour or consideration from this injured and long-suffering race? Still, the words of the Turbot had doubtless a meaning, and it might be the case that rabbits took a different view of their position from that which would undoubtedly have been taken by men under similar circumstances. At all events, the experiment was worth trying, and no harm was likely to result

from it. But where to go to and what to do were questions which rather puzzled poor Molly Goodchild, after she had come to the wise conclusion that it would be well to go somewhere and to do something.

As she stood doubting and wondering upon the beach, the thought suddenly came into her head that although she had lost her husband, there could be no reason why she should lose her supper into the bargain. If she had been a fine lady, she might possibly have begun to cry again, and afterwards have refused food, bathed her head with eau-de-cologne, fainted, gone into hysterics, or have done something else equally useless and ridiculous. But, being only a fisherman's wife, and withal very hungry after her long walk, she was by no means ashamed of her appetite and not at all disposed to refuse to satisfy its cravings. Moreover, to stand out on the beach for any length of time when the wind was blowing a gale, was not particularly pleasant to herself, and could do her husband no good. Wherefore Molly came to the determination to go back to the cottage and eat her supper by herself, and having adopted this sensible idea, proceeded at once to put it into execution.

I don't mean to say that she did not regret her husband's absence, which she certainly *did*, but it cannot be denied that it had but little effect upon her appetite. She ate heartily, drank her beer with a keen relish, and never cried again until she had quite finished her meal. Then the tears began to come into her eyes as she thought of her trouble, and she wondered what she could possibly do in order to get back her husband. She remembered that there was a large rabbit

warren about a mile off over the cliffs, and also that many of the little animals were to be seen in the large wood which ran down nearly to the sea at a break in the cliffs which occurred some mile and a half along the shore. To neither of these places, however, could she very well go that night, and eventually she came to the conclusion that she must spend a solitary evening, and wait until the morning light should enable her to take active measures. By this time the wind had fallen, and the waves beat less violently upon the beach. The cottage seemed more lonely than ever, and Molly felt desolate indeed as she sat by the window gazing out over the sea in the direction of the Witches' Island. As she gazed, a dim light appeared to glimmer along the edge of the island, as if a boat were moving along close in by the shore. Presently other lights seemed to flicker up, and evidently something was taking place upon that mysterious shore.

Molly kept her eyes steadily fixed in the same direction, and fancied that she could see dark figures flitting to and fro—then they seemed to come down close to the sea, and after a while the light she had first seen appeared to leave the island and come towards the mainland. The eager watcher could for some time make out nothing in the darkness which had now fallen upon the sea, but after a little while she clearly distinguished a boat, rowed by a single individual, but containing several others seated in the stern. Nearer and nearer it came, until at last it touched the beach with the usual harsh, grating noise of a boat pulled sharply in, and grounded within a

hundred yards of the spot where Molly Goodchild was sitting. She peered out into the darkness as well as she could, but could make out little in the increasing gloom. Suddenly, however, a vivid flash of lightning illuminated the whole scene. It was but for the space of a second, but in that brief time Molly saw enough to cause her considerable excitement. Four strange and weird-looking old women had landed on the beach, for what purpose she could not tell, whilst the man who had pulled them across remained sitting in the boat, and that man was none other than John Goodchild!

Molly's first impulse was to rush forth from the cottage and call loudly upon her husband. But her limbs refused to do her bidding, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She could neither move nor speak, and continued to gaze upon the scene before her with mingled astonishment and dread. Though the darkness still brooded over land and sea, she could faintly discern the figures of the females, whom she at once concluded to be witches and nothing else. Moreover, from time to time a flash of lightning momentarily lit up the coast, and in one of these instants she caught sight of her husband's face as he sat in the boat, pale and wan, and with an air of spell-bound quiet which at once, to her mind, corroborated the Turbot's story, and told but too surely that he was under the dominion of the fearful Island Witches. The latter had moved up somewhat nearer to the cottage, and having made a place for themselves upon the beach, deposited upon it certain faggots and proceeded to light a fire, upon which they placed some-

thing which looked to Molly Goodchild remarkably like a pie-dish. Such indeed it probably was, and most likely one of those primitive earthen dishes which folks of old used to place on their fires in order to bake the meat within.

However this may be, the fire soon burned up, and while it cooked the Witches' meat, gave Molly a better opportunity of observing their countenances and general appearance. They were certainly an ill-looking lot. One had the most awful squint you can imagine: another had very small eyes, a very thick nose, and a beard like that of a man; the third was humpbacked; and the fourth had her nose slit, and bore such an evil expression on her face that Molly thought she was certainly the ugliest old woman she had ever set eyes upon.

Whilst their supper was cooking the Witches produced several black bottles, the contents of which they poured into drinking-horns and appeared to imbibe with much satisfaction. Then they poked the fire and blew it to increase the flame, and turned the pie-dish round until they seemed to think the inside was thoroughly cooked, when they proceeded to take it off the fire, and, dividing it into four portions, began to devour it ravenously, only stopping to take occasional deep draughts from their horns.

When they had apparently concluded their repast, the Witches arose and shook the crumbs from their clothes for all the world as ordinary mortals might have done, and then, joining hands, danced slowly round the expiring fire, chanting as they did so in a slow, monotonous tone. And thus ran their song:—

I.

'The life of an island witch for us,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Away from the mainland bother and fuss:
Come to the island—won't you come?

II.

'Merry the life which we there do dwell,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Though what we all do, we decline to tell:
Come to the island—won't you come?

III.

'Shines on the water the glaring sun,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Then the wise witches are seen by none:
Come to the island—won't you come?

IV.

'But when darkness falls on the rolling wave,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Hither we come with our boatman slave:
Come to the island—won't you come?

V.

'Crafty and brave are the mortal men,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Till once they are safe in the witches' Den:
Come to the island—won't you come?

VI.

'There, though he chance to be lord or knave,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Man may be only the witches' slave:
Come to the island—won't you come?

VII.

'See the new slave in the boat sits still,
Harum scarum diddledee dum!
Bound by the spell he must do our will:
Come to the island—won't you come?'

Molly had sat listening with terror-stricken ears to the whole of this song, marvelling greatly at the whole proceeding. But the latter words changed the whole current of her ideas, and, for a time at least, banished terror from her soul. The idea of her husband—her own brave John, who, whatever might be his faults, had been her first and only love, and a faithful husband to her from their first days of marriage—the idea, I say, of her own man being the obedient slave of four old women—and such ugly old women, too, into the bargain—left no room in her mind for anything but rage and indignation. Springing from her seat by the window she hastened to the door, unfastened it as quickly as she could, and rushed frantically out on the beach, shouting as she did so at the top of her voice, 'John! John! I say, John! Come to I directly! 'Tis your own Molly! Come to I, John, and drat them witches!'

Now in all probability Mrs. Goodchild could not possibly have selected a form of address better calculated to defeat its own object. Had she sallied forth with good words in her mouth, or even a good book in her hands, it is impossible to say what the result might have been, or how the witches might have been affected. But the use of the words she uttered, disrespectful to the witches themselves, and scarcely elegant or becoming in the mouth of a female, if indeed in that of anybody else, was indeed but litt' likely to have any influence over the evil powers of magic. As soon as Molly had got outside the cottage the fire on the beach seemed to go out at once, and the darkness became more dense than ever, and she

only heard a scuffling, shambling sound, as if people, neither very young nor agile, were hurrying down to the sea as fast as they were able. Then there followed the sound of oars dipped in the water and of a boat going off.

'John! John! come to I!' again shouted poor Molly; but the only reply was a stifled groan, as if some one was making a violent effort to cry out, but failing signally from some cause unknown, and then came a low chuckle as of mocking laughter from the sea.

Molly stood still and listened in despair. The sound of the oars grew fainter and fainter—the laughter ceased—and she could hear nothing but the heavy, dull beating of the waves, which kept on breaking upon the beach as if they rather liked the operation and had no idea of ever leaving off. Then Molly returned to her cottage with a heart full of heaviness, and, sitting down upon the floor, fairly gave way and burst into a regular good fit of crying. I do not know—neither did she herself—how long the good woman continued in this state before she was aroused by a little tapping noise at the window, and looking sharply up, saw through her tears a small bird fluttering outside. Without the delay of a moment she arose and opened the casement, when a little sandpiper flew in and perched at once upon the table.

Now Molly Goodchild had always entertained a friendly feeling towards birds in general, and sandpipers in particular. Not that there was anything especially attractive in these birds, but they made

their nests in the cliffs near the cottage, and were quite like companions to the good woman sometimes when her husband was away at sea. True, she had never interchanged words with any of them, and was not even aware that they could speak; nor, indeed, was it usual for birds of this sort to come flying up against the cottage window and peck for admittance. Still, after the wonderful incident of the Turbot, Molly was prepared for anything, and it was therefore almost if not altogether without surprise that she heard the Sandpiper, after having shaken his damp feathers and wagged his head once or twice in a knowing manner, accost her in good English after the following fashion:—

'Dear Mrs. Goodchild,' said the bird, 'I am distressed—though not surprised—to see how unhappy you are.'

'Why, so would you be, my birdie,' answered the woman at once, 'if so be that you had a mate carried off by witches.'

'Indeed I should,' replied the bird; 'and it speaks well for the terms on which you have lived with your husband that you should miss him so much. But I do not come to bewail with, but to aid, you. I well know that you are in great grief, but I also know that it is a grief which may be remedied. I was flying past the large wood near the shore just now, and heard some of the little people talking the matter over. I heard them say that if you would only go and consult the Wise Rabbit, who burrows below the old hollow thorn-tree on the mound, they were quite sure he could and would help you out of your trouble.

So I thought, as you have always been friendly with us sandpipers, I would do you a good turn and come off and tell you at once.'

'Thank you kindly, birdie,' said the grateful woman; 'thank you kindly for your good news. I know the mound and the thorn-tree too, and I will certainly go there the very first thing to-morrow morning. But if my man is really the slave of them wretched creatures, I'm sure I don't know what ever I can do for to get him back again.'

'Leave that to the Rabbit!' cried the Sandpiper. 'And now, as I have done my errand, please to let me out of the window again, and if you will take my advice, you will forthwith go quietly to bed.'

Molly, being a sensible woman, saw the wisdom of this advice at once; she therefore first opened the window and let her little visitor depart, and then, feeling very tired, and knowing that she could do no more that night, turned into bed with as little delay as possible. There can be little doubt that she dreamed of witches, turbots, rabbits, and sandpipers during the night, but truth compels me to declare that, whether troubled by dreams or not, she managed to sleep until the sun had lighted up the sky with his morning beams, and all nature was again astir. The wind had lulled in the night, the waves had ceased to roar, and broke peacefully upon the shore, as if they wished to make friends with it and apologise for having dashed against it with such vehemence on the previous night. In short, it was one of those glorious mornings upon which everything looks its

best, and people really *feel that they are alive and that living is a privilege* and a pleasure.

Molly Goodchild was not long in rising and getting her breakfast, and although she felt lonely without her husband, she was cheered by the thought that she was about to take a step which, if all went well, might lead to his recovery. The Turbot had first turned her thoughts in the direction of the rabbits, and the kind little Sandpiper had just put her on the right scent as to the particular quarter in which she should enquire. His words had reminded her that among the scattered trees of the wood which I have already mentioned as stretching down to the shore, in a large valley formed by a break in the cliffs, there was a thorn-tree around which were several rabbit-holes. There was a clear space of green turf, in the middle of which, upon a species of mound, stood this tree, which was one of great antiquity, the very place for a Wise Rabbit to inhabit, if such an animal there were. As to this fact Molly would have been doubtful only the day before, but the scenes which she had witnessed made her ready to believe anything; and if a Turbot could laugh and sing, and a Sandpiper talk English like a native, why should not a Rabbit know as much as either of them? So Molly made ready directly after breakfast, put on her bonnet and shawl, and trudged away along the shore in the direction of the wood, which she reached without adventure.

Ascending the valley for a short distance, she presently approached the green space which has been already mentioned, and as she drew near, saw several

rabbits basking in the morning sunlight outside their holes. These animals, however, behaved after the usual manner of their race. Some disappeared immediately beneath the surface of the earth, others sat up, drummed violently and nervously upon the ground with their forefeet, as if to give their friends warning of the approach of a stranger, and then dived into their holes also; while some went down more slowly, leaving their heads visible above the earth as if they left the sun's rays with reluctance, then gradually drawing their heads downwards until only the tips of their ears were to be seen; and finally disappearing just as Molly set foot upon the outside of the roots of the old thorn-tree round which were their dwellings. These roots extended for some little way, for the thorn-tree was large as well as old, and Molly paused as soon as she had reached the first rabbit's hole.

To tell the truth, now for the first time it struck her that she did not know how to obtain from the Wise Rabbit the information and aid she desired. In that part of the world rabbits were not generally in the habit of communicating freely with mankind, from whom, indeed, they usually fled, and those of the race who inhabited the earths around the thorn-tree appeared to be no exception to the general rule. Moreover, she did not understand the Rabbit language, and had not the least idea how to address the animal she sought, so as to make him understand what she wanted. So she stopped at a few yards' distance from the tree, and stood in doubt and hesitation as to what she should do next. However, as

she had come to that place for a certain purpose, she determined not to depart without at least an effort to accomplish it, and therefore, after a few moments' thought, she spoke as follows :—

'Wise Rabbit, if so be that you live here, can you tell me what to do for to get my John back ?'

A faint breeze seemed to rustle the leaves of the old thorn-tree, and to sigh gently through the air, as almost immediately a voice replied, which seemed to come from the very tree itself, and was, though clear, a thin, weak voice, such as might have been expected to proceed from a person whose vital powers were weakened by age or illness ; and this is what it said :—

'The rabbits are an ancient race
Of very noble birth,
From mortal men they hide their face
Beneath their mother Earth.
For cruel man their race pursues
With snare, and dog, and gun,
So, lest they prematurely lose
Their lives, away they run.
Yet though thy friends this race oppress,
Some succour shalt thou find,
Since, ever, to relieve distress
Is worthy of our kind.
And though, as I have said before,
To man no thanks we owe,
A witch ten thousand times the more
We count our deadly foe.
Between us there is constant war,
For hundreds yearly die,
Because for food a witch by far
Prefers a rabbit-pie.
And so revenge we love to take
(Although the gain be man's),
And cause the witches' hearts to ache
By thwarting all their plans.'

Here the voice stopped, and Molly derived some satisfaction from its words, inasmuch as they assured her that the rabbits had reasons of their own for hating the witches, and she was wise enough to know that however kindly people may be disposed towards others, they usually act with more vigour and zeal if some motive of self-interest be added. But although the words she had heard were so far reassuring; Molly had not as yet been told what she was to do in order to rescue her husband from the power of the witches, and the fondness of the latter for rabbit-pie was of itself a circumstance which interested the good woman in a very small degree. So when the speaker came to an end, Molly became impatient, and without waiting many seconds, took up the conversation in her own way.

'Aye, they're a bad lot, them witches, so they are; but what be I to do for to sarcumvent them, Master Rabbit?'

And then the same voice uttered the following words:—

'By a witch when a man is enslaved
In an awkward condition is he,
And perils immense must be braved
By those who'd again set him free.
Yet things still more hard may be done
By a rabbit's invincible guile,
If the risk thou art ready to run,
And face the old hags on their isle!'

As the voice paused here, apparently expecting an answer, Molly at once boldly replied: 'Face 'em on their isle! aye, Rabbit, that I will, and scratch their eyes out, too, if I get a chance, for carrying off my John!'

Upon this a low chuckle of approbation proceeded from the old tree, and the voice again made itself heard to the listening ears of the anxious woman.

'Thirst and hunger are hard when unslaked,
But your husband to lose is still harder,
Though like rabbits he may not be baked,
Or hung by the legs in a larder.
But now to my words if you list,
Bright hope in your heart may rekindle;
Again by your John you'll be kiss'd,
And the witches you'll certainly swindle.
A boat you must take to the isle,
Where mortals have scarce been before you,
And take all precautions, meanwhile,
Lest the witches by magic come o'er you,
For monsters, no doubt, they will send
To fright you with grinning and frowning,
But never turn back, or you'll end
Your fortunes directly by drowning.
Before you launch out on the seas
Take one of your husband's old jackets,
For the pocket of which, if you please,
I will presently give you three packets.
'Number one," "number two," "number three,"
On each you will see its own label;
And mightily useful they'll be,
If to follow my orders you're able.
These orders I've written in prose,
Your intellect carefully priming,
For ne'er a wise rabbit but knows
What blunders may happen from rhyming!'

The voice ceased, and immediately afterwards three packets, apparently thrown by an invisible hand from the middle of the old thorn-tree, fell at Molly's feet. They were carefully done up in brown paper and labelled as the voice had stated, the words being

written in a large school-boy hand and being unmistakably clear.

There was also an envelope tied on to one of the packets, on which was written in the same hand, 'Mrs. Goodchild's Directions;' so that everything was as plain as possible. There were several other things, however, which Molly was anxious to know. Supposing she got to the island, what should she do next? There were evidently dangers to be encountered before she *did* get there, but what was to happen afterwards? Struck by this thought, and with the absolute necessity of knowing something more about it, Molly took courage to ask, as the most likely way of obtaining the information she wanted.

'Thank you, indeed, Mr. Rabbit,' said she in her most respectful tone, 'for what you have already done; but will you tell me what be I to do if so be as I get safe on to the island?'

To her great joy the voice replied at once:—

'One word of power to thee I tell,
Potent to break the witches' spell.
Eat not—drink not—nor look behind.
Lest evil consequence ye find.
Be firm yet civil; should they spare
Thy husband to thee then and there,
Come back at once, let no delay
Or wish for vengeance clog thy way.
But should they thy request deny,
Their malice thou canst still defy;
For if in danger or distress,
Say boldly *then*—but not unless—
"Wharlmone!" The magic word of might
More than all else will help thee right

Molly had listened with the utmost attention to this speech, and was exceedingly glad that she had asked the question. Still, she did not feel very certain what she should do when once upon the Witches' Island, and determined to ask for still further and more particular orders. But not another word, good, bad, or indifferent, could she extract from the Wise Rabbit. So, after a while, she left off trying, took up the three packets with great care, and returned to the cottage without further delay. When she had arrived there, she sat down and thought carefully over all that had passed, calling to mind as well as she could the exact words which had fallen from her thorn-tree adviser. Then she deliberately opened the envelope which was addressed to herself, and read the directions therein contained. The first was easily to be comprehended and required no explanation:

'Do nothing until after dinner.'

As Molly was somewhat tired with her walk in the sun, and it was then getting towards eleven o'clock, she was by no means indisposed to take this first piece of advice, especially as, according to the habits of the labouring classes in that part of the world, she usually dined soon after noon. Then there followed some directions of a more dubious and elaborate character.

'Row gently, but stop for no one.
Packet "number one" is for Babeface the Skate.
Packet "number two" is for Grimjaw the Dog-fish.
Packet "number three" is for Scareman the Devil-fish.'

These were words which Molly entirely failed to

understand ; but having by this time arrived at a state of complete confidence in her counsellors, she made up her mind to observe all the directions faithfully, and leave to those wiser than herself the task of showing to her the moment at which she was to act in any particular manner.

So, first and foremost, she busied herself in preparations for her dinner, and when the hour for that repast had arrived, sat down and ate as heartily as could have been expected under the circumstances. Having done this, she went into a little shed attached to the cottage, in which a couple of boats were always kept, one of which was of a small and manageable size for her powers of rowing. This, without much difficulty, she pushed down to the water's edge. Then she fetched one of her husband's old jackets, put it on, and placed in the pockets the three packets which she had received. Next she provided herself with oars, and having ascertained that she had everything in the boat necessary for her trip, launched boldly forth upon the sea, and pulled straight towards the Witches' Island.

The sun was shining brightly above her head, and the sea was calm and as clear as crystal, a mighty contrast indeed to its appearance on the previous evening. As she looked over the boat's side she could see quantities of fish darting about here and there, or sailing quietly round her as if wondering who it was that was invading their domain, and making such a splashing noise above their heads. Suddenly, however, a change came over the face of the deep. Molly's boat had got about half-way between

the mainland and its destination, when a little wind began to rise and a ripple to come upon the surface of the sea. Gradually, too, the sun seemed to become dim, and a kind of twilight shade stole over the heavens, much as if it had been an hour after sunset instead of two o'clock in the middle of the day. Still Molly rowed bravely on, when, without any previous warning, a voice close behind her boat called out in accents of despair, 'Stop! stop! pray pick me up! I'm drowning!'

Now Molly was a woman of tender heart, and under ordinary circumstances would not have hesitated to do as she was requested, and make every effort to save the person who thus accosted her. Fortunately, however, the written directions of the Rabbit were still vividly impressed upon her recollection. Moreover, she knew very well that she had passed nobody hitherto in her passage, and if anybody had been swimming so close to her boat as the voice seemed to be, it was impossible but that she must have seen that 'anybody.' So she continued to row, perhaps a trifle more slowly for an instant, and then at the same pace as before, gently but steadily, entirely disregarding the voice and its request.

In another moment or two another voice, apparently just in front of her boat, shouted, 'Look ahead! you can't pass here!'

Molly glanced round, still gently rowing on, and seeing nobody in the way, still rowed on at the same pace. But the water now grew rougher, and the waves dashed against the little boat as if they would swamp it. Somehow or other, though, they did not

fill her, and she rode gallantly on the crest of the waves, although, now on one side, now on the other, she bowed before their force and seemed as if nothing could prevent her from filling and sinking. Nothing daunted, Molly rowed steadily forward, and looked neither to the right nor the left. She was now within little more than a hundred yards from the island, when suddenly an enormous Skate reared itself out of the water quite close to her with its mouth wide open, presenting an appearance more repulsive than she had supposed possible even in one of those remarkably ugly creatures. 'Come below, Molly!' it said, as it yawned with a palpable wish that she should jump down its throat, which was the very last thing she would ever have thought of doing. Stretching out her right hand, while still rowing with the left, though of course very softly, and only so as just to keep the boat in motion, she took from her husband's jacket the packet marked number one, and threw it quietly into the creature's mouth.

The effect was instantaneous. The packet burst as it entered the place into which it was thrown, and evidently contained a powder of an explosive character. With a sound like the popping of a thousand soda-water bottles all at once, the unhappy Skate blew up instantaneously, and sank below the waters in many pieces. Molly had not taken more than a second or two in the performance of her part of this drama, and went on rowing as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened. It was startling, certainly, but after all a skate was not a fish of much account, and

she was delighted to have so satisfactorily tested the efficacy of the Rabbit's powders.

Within a very short distance, however, another interruption took place. A huge Dog-fish, of fierce and brutal appearance, reared his head out of the water, and in an awful voice shouted, 'Look out for Grimjaw!' as he made a snap at her right-hand oar, which, had he succeeded in catching hold of, he would undoubtedly have severed in two, and thus seriously impeded her progress. Most luckily, however, he missed it by a hair's breadth, and in another instant packet number two was in his mouth. Bursting as it entered his jaws, it filled them completely with a quantity of the strongest glue, which was not only unpleasant to taste and smell, and nearly choked him at once, but, on his first snapping his teeth to prevent more of the nauseous stuff coming therein, held them together as with a vice, and in fact stopped his jaw in a prompt and effectual manner.

On rowed Molly, better satisfied than ever with the result of her journey, as far as it had gone, and in most excellent hopes of success. She was now scarcely thirty yards from the island, when there arose from the sea the most awful creature which she had ever seen in the shape of a fish. Its head was more ugly than she had supposed possible, its mouth was armed with a double row of teeth, sharp as a needle, and evidently strong enough to make short work of any creature upon which they were once fastened; it had little arms instead of ordinary fins, and a tail of mighty power, which it swung viciously to and fro as if to stir itself up to action.

The sight of this terrible thing, which Molly at once came to the conclusion was the 'Devil-fish' alluded to in the Rabbit's directions, was almost enough to have frightened any ordinary person into a fit. With a kind of hissing roar the dreadful creature launched itself against the side of the boat, and accosting the astonished Molly in her own language, remarked in a gruff and decidedly unpleasant voice, 'You are mine, woman! you are mine! No mortal woman can touch this island. You shall make a meal for Scareman.'

The mouth of the hideous monster was so close to her that Molly had scarcely time to perform the act by which alone she could hope to be delivered from his attack. She was *just* able, and only just, to seize packet number three and hurl it into his mouth, and had she been a second later it would have gone hard with her. But the packet was no less valuable to her and fatal to her adversary than the others had proved before it. Like them, it burst as soon as it touched the open mouth of the fish, which it completely filled with sulphuric acid. In a moment his face changed to a woful expression of fishlike despair, and he sank like a log to the bottom of the sea and was seen no more. Thus, then, her three packets had each delivered her from a formidable foe, and the fisherman's wife felt that the power and friendship of the rabbits had not failed her.

There was still, however, much to be done, and her main difficulty at the moment was to decide what to do when she had landed. She was now within a dozen yards of the island, which at that

part was girt with a fringe of reeds, into which she could easily run her boat and step out upon the shore. Her natural impulse would have been to stop and look out for some natural landing place, but as she had been told on no account to stop rowing, she deemed it best to go straight on, and in another minute the boat made its way into the reeds, and could go no farther. Molly rose, and having laid down her oars, stepped lightly forward and jumped from the boat on to the shore. It was somewhat different from that which she had quitted.

A grass bank came quite down to the water, and upon this she at once set her feet. Some twenty yards before her was a wood of low, stunted oaks, extending on either side for some distance, but never nearer to the sea. The trees appeared as if they had most of them been struck by lightning, or exposed to some blighting influence which had dwarfed their growth, and rendered their foliage unnaturally sere and yellow. Ever and anon great rocks of a dark grey hue, o'ergrown by a coarse kind of moss, rose abruptly among the low trees, which were by no means thickly planted, and here and there a tall cedar or Scotch fir reared its head on high, looking as bare as trees could look, and giving a somewhat wild appearance to the place. All was still and silent as the grave, and although the wind had fallen again and the sea was calm, the sun had not again re-asserted his right to shine, but twilight was still reigning over the face of the earth.

When she found herself safe on shore, Molly Goodchild stood still, in great doubt as to her next

movement. Whilst she hesitated she heard a kind of low twittering noise behind her, and looking round, perceived a sight which filled her with surprise. At a few yards distant from the spot at which she had landed, there was a break of several yards in the reeds which girt the shore, and this was occupied by a bed of light-coloured sand, sloping down from the green bank to the water. Upon this bank were assembled a great multitude of shrimps, among whom were a few prawns, who had apparently left their native element for purposes of festivity. Standing upon their tails, this multitude of small fishes was engaged in dancing, tumbling about, and jostling one another after the most curious fashion, and to all appearance enjoying themselves exceedingly. As they danced they sang, and Molly listened with attention to the words of their ditty, although their shrill and small voices rendered it somewhat difficult to interpret their meaning.

'Fisherman John he is fast spell-bound;
Ho! Ha! Fisherman John!
Where would another poor woman be found
Such a fool's errand to journey upon!
Molly has followed the watery track;
Ho! Ha! Fisherman John!
Thinks she to get her poor fisherman back?
Vainly his jacket she's ventured to don!
Joy to the fishes, the small and the great,
Spell-bound is Fisherman John!
Loudly they joy at their enemy's fate,
Now for the villain escape there is none!'

Molly understood quite enough of this song to render it very unpleasant to her ears, and what made it all the more so was the circumstance of its being

sung by what she called 'a parcel of little hop-i-my-thumb creatures,' such as she had often eaten on bread and butter, three or four at a mouthful, for her tea, and thought nothing of it. In fact, as she gazed upon them, she could not help thinking how much better the little things looked boiled than when alive in the water, and heartily wishing that she could sweep the whole lot of them into one of her husband's trawling nets: this however was impossible at the moment, and her meditation was broken in upon by another incident of a very different character.

Walking along the bank, and coming directly towards her, were three ladies dressed in the height of fashion. They had such small bonnets upon their heads that you could scarcely tell whether they were bonnets at all, or only a few feathers fastened together upon the hair, especially as they had no strings upon them. Their dress was altogether such as I cannot pretend to describe, not being used to the sort of thing, but if any young gentleman who reads this story will consider which of his sisters dresses best in the London season, he will be able to form some idea of the appearance of the three persons who now approached Molly Goodchild. Nearer and nearer they came, and wore sweet smiles upon their faces as they accosted the fisherman's wife.

'Good woman,' said one of them, fixing upon Molly a pair of eyes which were bright with an unnatural light which made her almost tremble in spite of herself, 'how came you here? Not but what you are very welcome. Come into the wood-walks with us, and you shall see how pleasant the island is.'

'No, thank you, Ma'am,' replied Molly with a respectful curtsey; 'I be come upon business and aint got no time to go pleasure-seeking.'

'Oh! but you really *must* come,' cried the second, advancing a step nearer; 'and if you should like the place well enough to live with us, it so happens that we are in want of a cheerful companion, and might very likely engage you if we could come to terms.'

'Ay,' observed the third, 'and you shall be dressed in fine clothes as we are, and live in clover and have everything of the best.'

As they spoke, the three ladies all looked eagerly upon Molly, and she felt a kind of curious sensation as she remarked the strange, weird brightness of their eyes, and a certain wistful expression of pain which seemed to be stamped upon the countenance of each. I will not say that the vision of fine clothes and good victuals, without toil or trouble to obtain either, might not have had some momentary attraction for the fisherman's wife. But the thought of her John, stolen or charmed from her, and of the dangers of the place in which she was, was instantly present with her. So she boldly relinquished any latent inclination she might have had to entertain the proposal made to her, and with a firm and bold voice replied: 'No, I thank you, ladies, I be come here for my John: Goodchild by name and fisherman by trade, and if I get him back I don't care for none o' them things you talk of.'

Upon this all three of those she addressed cried out with one voice. 'Oh the brazen-faced hussey!' said

the first. 'Hear the impudent jade!' cried the second. 'Look at the vile creature!' shrieked the third; and as they spoke they all rushed together upon Molly, as if to punish her for her prompt rejection of their proposals.

The time for action had evidently come. 'Wharkmone!' exclaimed Molly in a loud voice, and no sooner was the word out of her mouth than a wonderful change came over the beings she addressed. Their fine clothes turned into shabby old gowns, their smart bonnets became hideous caps of an antiquated fashion, from beneath which scattered grey hairs streamed out as they started back, and in place of three fashionable ladies, there appeared before Molly three wrinkled old hags who turned their backs upon her without more ado, and fled away into the wood as fast as they were able.

Molly stared with astonishment at this strange occurrence, but became more than ever convinced of the dangerous character of the island as well as of the power of the Wise Rabbit. As it was evidently useless to stand still, she thought she had better take the only other alternative, and move on. She therefore turned to the right, and walked along the shore, calling from time to time to her husband in hopes of an answer. 'John Goodchild! John, I say! John!' were the words with which she made the island shore re-echo as she walked on by the sea.

But no John replied to her call. The waves rippled gently against the shore, the same shades of twilight hung over the island, and the wind softly rustled in the leaves of the oak-trees, but no living

creature appeared, and Molly knew not what to do or whence to seek for aid. She must have wandered on in this way for half a mile or more, when she began to think that it was evidently no use to look for her husband by the sea, and that there was nothing for it but to make up her mind to go boldly into the interior of the island. Scarcely had she come to this conclusion when she perceived a path leading from the shore in an inland direction. It was not a very wide path, but quite wide enough for one person to walk on, and it was apparently the only road on that side of the island from which the wood could be entered.

So Molly boldly turned up this path and moved forward, still calling upon John as she advanced. Presently the wood grew thicker, the oaks appeared to be less stunted, ivy plants of great size clung round them, immense creepers interlaced their branches, thick bramble-bushes and low-growing thorn-trees filled the intervening spaces, and Molly could see little either to her right or left as she advanced along the path. Suddenly, her attention was attracted to a large board fixed upon a tree at the side of the path, upon which was inscribed in large letters, 'No thoroughfare! trespassers in these woods will be prosecuted as the law directs.' Whilst on another board immediately below the following startling information was given to the traveller: 'Man traps and spring-guns in these woods!' Molly stopped for an instant in surprise. This all seemed so very like what she had seen in certain localities on the mainland, that she could hardly believe she was in the Witches' Island. They could certainly have no need

of the law to enforce their rights, and she would have thought that they would naturally have steered as clear of it as they could. When she read the second notice she gave a heavy sigh.

'Ay,' she said, 'sure enough, man-traps there be, for my John has been caught here; but for all that I'll get him back. Law or no law, I must search till I find my man!' and again she loudly shouted, 'John! John Goodchild!' at the top of her voice.

This time she was not left without an answer. 'There he is!' cried a voice apparently a little way in front of her. She moved hastily forward. 'Here he is!' called out another voice which seemed to come from behind her; and similar voices gave utterance to the same words on her right hand and on her left.

'Where?' exclaimed Molly. 'Where is he? Where are you, John?'

'Here!' 'Here!' 'Here!' cried the voices again from all quarters, and then peals of wild, mocking laughter rang through the air, and all was again silent.

As may be easily imagined, Molly felt entirely bewildered, and, moreover, a sensation akin to fear stole over her when she heard these unearthly sounds. But she summoned up all her courage, and took several steps forward, exclaiming as she did so, 'John! John! 'Tis I, your own wife Molly. Come to I!' Again the same wild laughter sounded in her ears, but she saw nothing, and began to despair of succeeding in her mission.

At that moment, however, she heard a fluttering of wings almost close to her, and before she had time to turn round, a bat flew quickly past her, dropping

as he did so a letter, which fell at her feet. Stooping down, she saw with some surprise that it was directed to her, at least the words, 'For Molly' were written on the envelope, and this could certainly mean no one else. So she opened it without delay, and found these words:—

'Dear Wife,—I am very well and very happy. It is quite a mistake to suppose that witches are bad people. The ladies who live in this island and whom we have always called witches, are charming people and very kind to me. Make friends with them if you can, it will be better for both of us, and you will be glad afterwards.

'Your affectionate husband,

'JOHN GOODCHILD.'

Never had Molly been so much astonished in her life as at the perusal of this letter. The advice which it contained appeared extraordinary, the manner in which it had been delivered was, to say the least of it, unusual, and, coupling it with the invitation given her by the three strange beings whom at her first landing she had encountered in the shape of well-dressed ladies, she felt that there was evidently a design on the part of the witches to afford her, as well as her husband, a permanent residence on the island.

But, as Molly was no fool, she not only regarded with suspicion the advice contained in the letter, but entertained the gravest doubts with respect to the letter itself. Had it really come from John? he had never written her such a letter before in all his life. Indeed, writing was not an art in which he at all ex-

celled, and the well-written copy-book-like hand in which this letter was written was as different from John Goodchild's zig-zag tumble up-and-down scrawl as chalk from cheese. The spelling too, which had never been John's strong point, was, as far as Molly could judge, quite right all through the letter, and there was not a single smudge or blot on the whole paper. This last point quite decided Molly's opinion. Throwing the letter down upon the ground she contemptuously kicked it with her foot, and exclaimed at the same time, 'My John never sent no such letter as that, not he.'

This little incident put Molly, if possible, even more on her guard than she had been before. It was evident that the enemy was now dealing with her rather by fraud and guile than by open violence, and she determined to be doubly careful. She thought carefully over the words of the Wise Rabbit, and remembered that she had just now very nearly disobeyed his injunctions by looking behind her when the bat flew up from that direction. But it was difficult not to look behind as well as before and on each side, when her object was to discover her husband, and for the last half hour she had seen no one who could tell her anything about him. However, at that moment the path led her into a new scene, which made her for the moment forget the letter and its advice. An oak-tree larger than its neighbours stood so close to the path that a portion of the latter was occupied by its trunk, past which Molly saw she would have to brush if she wished to go any farther. As she came within a few feet of it, a voice suddenly

issued from the tree, and addressed her in the following manner, singing new and strange words to the tune of a song which she had often heard her husband carol forth in his manly tones in former happy days :—

I

'John Goodchild one day
From the mainland did stray,
Saying, "Barren and dreary is *my* land,
'Twould be much more jolly
To quit melancholy,
And dwell on yon beautiful island."
Oh! 'tis a sweet little island!
The witches they live on the island;
They heard what he asked
On the beach while he basked,
And took him to live on their island!

II.

'His wife was from home
When he hither did come,
Or scarce he'd have ventured to try land;
But the sea he's now left,
And his wife, all bereft,
Comes to drag him away from our island.
Oh! 'tis a nice little island!
Come, Molly and live on the island!
Come, nothing loth,
There is room for you both,
And you're welcome to stop in the island!

III.

'Both, well shall we treat;
You'll have plenty to eat,'
And have no occasion to buy land;
For yours it will be,
Both the earth and the sea,
If you stay in this beautiful island.

Oh! 'tis a beautiful island!
Pray, Molly, stay in the island.
Listen to me;
Happy you'll be,
If only you stay in the island.

IV.

'But if you desire
That John should retire
And go with you back to that nigh land,
I vow and declare,
And solemnly swear,
You shan't take him off from the island.
Oh! 'tis a dear little island!
John is so fond of the island!
Do what you will
John stops here still,
And never goes back from our island!'

Molly listened with open ears to this song, which plainly showed that the policy of the witches was still the same. Evidently they intended to keep her husband if they could, and were for tempting her by every possible device from continuing her endeavours to get him back. But two thoughts occurred to Molly as she listened and considered the meaning of this song and the reason of its being sung. One was that the witches could not really be very desirous of her company, even if they really would treat her as kindly as they promised. For, in the first place, had they been of friendly disposition towards her, they would not have carried off her husband and left her alone, without any invitation to follow, or information as to where they had taken him; and secondly, it struck her, that they must know her to be under the protection of beings more powerful than themselves, and to be worth conciliating, otherwise it was most im-

probable that they would make these tempting and flattering proposals to one who had, unasked and in spite of opposition, invaded their island and penetrated the woods from which trespassers were so carefully warned. So the effect of the song was to make Molly more determined than ever to persevere, and not to lose heart in her attempt to recover her lost John.

Had she been a better-educated woman, she would probably have replied to the songster of the oak after the same fashion in which she had been addressed, and perhaps have stung him or her with terse and epigrammatic verse, so that matters might have been brought to a crisis without further delay. But Molly lived in days when the advantages of a high education for the working classes had not been fully appreciated. She could read and write and knew enough of sums to be able to manage her husband's accounts to his and her satisfaction. Moreover she could do plain cooking, roast a bird or joint, broil or fry a fish, and make a pudding against any fisherman's wife in the neighbourhood. And, in those dull times, these practical accomplishments were thought sufficient for persons in Molly's station in life and they rarely aspired beyond them.

So she made no attempt to answer in rhyme, nor did it once enter her head to undertake such a task, in which, if she had done so, she would undoubtedly have failed. She merely waited until the song was finished and then marched calmly on, brushing past the oak as if nobody was there, or, at all events, nobody whom it concerned her to notice. She had not gone many steps farther, when an enormous

hedgehog placed itself in the path before her and obstructed the way. It was as big as an ordinary mastiff, with bristles of proportional length, and a snout of remarkably disagreeable and threatening appearance.

Altogether, a more unpleasant animal to meet in a narrow path could hardly be imagined, and there it stood, as if its object and intention was to prevent Molly from going on. For a moment she hesitated—the creature looked so repulsive, and it was impossible to pass without touching him. Pass, however, she must, and it was no use being afraid now, after all that had happened. Molly felt, indeed, that she was fairly 'in for it,' and that the time for doubt and hesitation was over. So she stepped boldly up to the hedgehog, just as if he had been one of ordinary size, whom she could kick out of her way.

She was within a yard of him when, to her extreme astonishment, he utterly disappeared, and instead of him a gigantic snake coiled itself up in the path a little farther on. Unable, however, to see why a snake should not be treated in the same way as a hedgehog, and feeling more than ever confident in the power of her Protectors, Molly walked resolutely on; and the snake presently vanished like the other, his place being taken by a toad of wonderful size. He, however, failed to frighten the fisherman's wife any more than those who had gone before him, and she pressed forward until the path led her out into an open space, where other and surprising sights greeted her wondering eyes.

A table was set in the middle of the place, covered

THE WITCHES' ISLAND.

with the good things of this world in great abundance. Fish, meat, pastry, cheese; all were there in sufficient quantity to have feasted a regiment. Flowers and fruit were scattered in profusion all over the table, gay festoons of the former hung from the branches of the surrounding trees, and flags were streaming in the air on every side. All around the table were chairs, placed for those who had the honour of partaking of that feast, and in those chairs were seated some dozen or more ladies, dressed in different costumes, and apparently bent on enjoying themselves as much as possible. They were waited upon by such waiters as Molly had never before seen or heard of as acting in that capacity. A number of cats, each in livery, ran nimbly round the table upon their hind legs, handing the dishes and offering them to each guest with respectful alacrity. Each cat had a napkin in its paw, and was in every respect dressed as a footman should be. One, larger and fatter than the rest, evidently acted as butler. He was a great tom cat, who bore himself in a manner entirely corresponding with the high dignity to which he had attained, and confined himself principally to helping the guests to wine, which he did continually and with much regularity.

But the most extraordinary thing of all has yet to be related. Seated in a large arm-chair at the head of the table was a real and veritable Donkey. Yes: from head to tail, feet, ears, skin, everything was undoubtedly real about him, and there the animal was seated as comfortably as possible. More than this, however, he appeared to be the object of general attraction on the part of the ladies present. Not only did those

who were sitting at table repeatedly nod and bow to him, drink his health, and make him pretty speeches every other minute, but several more, standing close to his chair, showed such a desire to supply all his wants, that it was quite superfluous for the servants to wait upon him at all. One lady, fashionably attired in a blue silk dress with an expensive lace shawl negligently thrown over her shoulders, held a parasol over the beast's head to shield him from the rays of the sun, which, as the sun had not re-appeared, seemed to Molly rather an unnecessary measure of precaution. Another kept filling his glass and trying to pour the wine down his throat even before he was ready for it. A third stood anxiously waiting to change his plate; whilst a fourth was busily engaged in placing a garland of flowers upon his head.

Molly stared in the greatest astonishment at the sight of so extraordinary a spectacle, the meaning of which she could in no way make out to her own satisfaction. She had not long to stare, however, for as soon as she had stepped forth from the path into the open space, a cry arose from the ladies at the table, half-a-dozen of whom shouted out all at once, 'Here comes dear Mrs. Goodchild at last! Good morning, Mrs. Goodchild! Pray come and join our party; we are so glad to see you!'

In spite of all that had already happened, Molly was entirely confused and astonished at this reception. It was all so different from what she had expected. She thought she should have had to encounter dangers, threats, perhaps bodily suffering, before she could attain the object of her wishes. Instead of this, how-

ever, it seemed that the witches (if they really *were* witches) were all milk and honey in their dealings with her, and whatever their ultimate intentions might be, they certainly showed no desire to do her evil, now that she was fairly in the island, whatever they might have had to do with the marine monsters who had opposed her landing.

Still, she remembered the old proverb that 'All is not gold that glitters,' and moreover she bore in mind the caution of the Wise Rabbit that she was not to eat or drink upon the island. Therefore she determined that she would not yield to the blandishments of the beings before her. Encouraged, however, by her momentary silence and apparent hesitation, several of them rose from their places and held out towards her dishes containing various eatables, which at that moment, after her row and her walk, would have been decidedly acceptable to the good woman. Moreover, at a sign from one of the party, several of the cats advanced towards her with wine and cake, and one sorely tempted her with a cup of tea and some remarkably nice-looking slices of bread and butter. But Molly was proof against it all. She looked straight at the table and exclaimed in a clear voice but with a manner perfectly respectful, 'I thank ye kindly, ladies, but I don't want nothing only my man John.—John Goodchild! where be you?'

As soon as these words were out of her mouth, a loud burst of almost hysterical laughter from all the party caused Molly to look at them with still greater surprise. What were they doing? Everyone of them pointing with outstretched arms at the Donkey in the

chair at the head of the table, and positively yelling with laughter, which, however, had a ring of pain about it as it died away almost in a moan. Molly could not understand it at all, and possibly never would have done so, had not a new and still more extraordinary event followed. The Donkey spoke! Not in the natural bray of that worthy animal, but in a human voice, and that voice none other than the voice of John Goodchild himself! And this is what it said:—

'Really, Molly, it is very rude of you to refuse the kindness which is offered you by these excellent ladies. I wonder you can behave so, though why you should intrude here at all is more than I know. Either join us or leave us, if you please.'

Molly stood perfectly aghast at these words. The language was better than that in which her husband habitually expressed himself, but the voice was most unmistakably his. It was not this, however, of which Molly was thinking, but of the base ingratitude of the man for whom she had ventured so much. Not only did he not thank her for her attempts to save him, but actually appeared to resent her coming! Was he, then, after all, there by his own choice, and happier than he had been before? Was it possible that he had gained by his change and that she would be doing him an injury instead of a benefit by reclaiming him? And—worse than all—had he found some one among the fashionable ladies who formed his present society, whom he preferred to her, Molly, his lawful wedded wife, and from whom he was now unwilling to part? All these thoughts passed like lightning through the

poor woman's mind, and were then succeeded by others which drove them thence.

No: she argued to herself; 'men might be false; she had often heard her female friends say so, though from her experience of her John, she had never greatly believed them. Men might like pleasure better than work, men might be fond of good eating and drinking, and lively society, and for such things they might, for a time at least, neglect and leave the domestic comforts of their own firesides. Nay, more than all this, it was just within the range of possibility that some men might even go so far as to prefer, upon certain occasions, the company of other ladies to that of their own wives, though this was a point not readily to be conceded. But no man that ever existed willingly assumed the shape of a donkey, and delighted in the company of those who had invested him with that uncouth form and appearance. Therefore, if that animal were really her husband, it was clear to Molly that he was under some magic spell, and that the words he had used, and the sentiments he had conveyed in those words, were not really his own. Once firmly convinced of this, the fisherman's wife did not hesitate as to her reply.

'You great Donkey!' she exclaimed, 'I know your voice is my John's voice, and as sich I answer it. You are not the first man, no doubt, that has been made an ass of by a woman, and probably you won't be the last. But how ever you can go for to wear such a shape is more than I can tell! Come home, John, I tell you, and don't sit mumbling and grumbling there like a great porpoise.'

As she spoke Molly kept her eyes steadfastly fixed upon the Donkey, in whom there appeared to be some violent internal struggle going on, as if he wanted to speak and couldn't, and was at all events not as happy in his own mind as an ordinary donkey ought to be. The ladies around him redoubled their attentions, and those at the table, all rising up with one accord and holding full glasses in their hands, cried out at the top of their voices, 'Here's a health to our dear Donkey!' entirely drowning Molly's concluding words.

In noways disconcerted by this conduct, Molly took a step forward, and finding that her ass of a husband either could not or would not give a satisfactory response to her appeal, determined upon addressing those to whom he doubtless owed his present condition.

'Ladies!' she cried. 'If sich ye be, and if not, by whatever may be your right name, I asks you for to give me back my John. Bean't you ashamed for to keep him away from his home and his wife like this? And to clothe a Christian man in that there donkey's skin, it is a sin and shame I do declare!'

Once more arose the shrill and discordant laughter at Molly's words; and, seeing that she was resolute in her determination not to join their party, the company all rose from the table, and forming a circle round the Donkey, began to sing in as loud a tone as possible, as if they would scare Molly away by their noise:—

Fisherman John is a donkey now,
Vainly his wife may require him on shore;
Vainly she asks us her wish to allow;
Johnny shall never go back any more!

Slave of the island he rows in the boat,
So the salt sea we can merrily pass;
Then, when we care not to venture afloat,
Johnnie we turn to a regular ass.
Johnnie shall row, aye! and Johnnie shall bray,
But never again from our isle go away!'

As they sang these words, the whole party began to dance round and round the Donkey, who sat there with imperturbable gravity, having apparently had quite as much wine as was good for him, or at all events seeming to be quite confused by what was going on around him. What made the dance appear stranger still was that all the waiters joined in it also; and to see a number of cats in livery dancing about in this manner was so absurd that at any other time Molly would certainly have gone into fits of laughter. She was, however, in no laughing mood just now, especially as the dancers cast glances at her, the reverse of friendly, and some of them began to approach her in their antics with demonstrations which appeared decidedly hostile. She could bear it no longer, so stepping forward with a courage which you would hardly have supposed her to possess, she advanced close to the dancers, and remembering the word which the Wise Rabbit had given her as a talisman against evil, she exclaimed in a loud voice. 'John Goodchild! come home! Wharlmone, I say!'

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when a scream broke forth from every individual present—not an ordinary scream, but a terrible, unearthly, painful scream, such as may be imagined by those who have powerful imaginations, but can hardly be described by the pen of a living writer. It pierced through Molly's

ears with such a shrill and awful sound that she put up both her hands immediately to keep it out. Nevertheless, being determined to carry out the thing to the end, and not knowing whether the mere mention of the magic word once would be sufficient, Molly resolutely pronounced it again. 'Come!' said she, 'I be come here for my John, and I'll have him in spite of ye all. Wharlmone!'

A second, but more feeble cry once more burst forth from the dancers. In another moment the same curious metamorphosis took place which Molly had witnessed in the case of the three ladies who had first accosted her upon the island: the fine clothes of all the ladies present turned to shabby garments, they themselves assumed the appearance of ugly and decrepid old women, the livery fell off from the attendant cats, and the whole company fled groaning and moaning and howling into the woods on either side of the open space. But this was not all. The table, with all the good things that had been upon it, utterly disappeared. In its place there was only to be seen the large stump of an enormous tree which had long ago been blown down or struck by lightning so that only a portion of the trunk remained, and instead of the Donkey who had so recently been reposing in state at the head of the table, Molly perceived her husband sitting at the foot of the tree, leaning against it, and rubbing his eyes in a confused and woebegone manner. She went up to him at once.

'Oh John! come home at once, my man! what *has* come to you and what have you been doing?' John looked up and rubbed his eyes again. 'What, Molly

lass, is it you come after me? I don't rightly know what has happened or where I be? Bean't I on the beach, then?'

'Oh no, John, my man, you are on the Witches' Island, and a terrible place it be sure-ly. Come with I at once or goodness only knows what may happen yet!'

John still rubbed his eyes in an uncertain manner; but Molly was not to be denied. Rousing him from his dreamy state by sundry exhortations accompanied by judicious pinches in the fleshy part of his arm, she got him on his legs, turned his head towards the path by which she had herself come, and hastened him on his way towards the spot where she had left the boat. She determined to ask no more questions at that moment, but to concentrate all her energies upon the one object of getting her husband safe home again. John tramped along unresistingly, like one still in a dream, and no obstacle appeared in the path.

Meanwhile the sun had reasserted his right to shine. All these proceedings had not taken half so long as it takes to write them, and it was not yet five o'clock. Molly and her husband reached the boat safely, and entering it without molestation, were just about to put off from the shore when suddenly a young and by no means ill-looking damsel ran hastily out of the part of the wood nearest to the place where the boat had been moored, and exclaimed in a voice of entreaty, 'Oh *do* take me on board! *Please* do! I am so *very* anxious to get away from this island if I can! Let me come with you—there must be room for one more!'

John turned his head sheepishly round, too much confused and ashamed to say anything to this request, and Molly saw that it would fall upon her to deal with it. The woman looked respectable, but then the Witches had looked even more than respectable, and she could not but feel misgivings, though she knew not how to express them without appearing rude or unkind. So she backed the boat a little, and said in her own good-natured voice, 'Well, if so be that you really wants to come along with us, there's room enough if you sit quiet.'

Without another word the person addressed stepped into the boat, which John then mechanically pushed off, and Molly, who had thought it best that she should herself take the oars, began steadily to row towards the shore. But the boat appeared to be so unusually heavy that she made but little progress, and felt she was tiring herself for nothing.

'Here! John, my man,' she said, 'do you take an oar and lend a hand. She don't go just as should be.' The words were scarcely out of her mouth when the young damsel, who had until that moment been sitting quietly near to John, suddenly threw her arms round his neck, shouted in a wild discordant voice, 'Come back, my Johnnie! ehaw! ehaw!' and capsized the boat before you could say Jack Robinson.

In a single instant Molly realised the state of affairs. The crafty witch whom she had been foolish enough to take on board was guiding John by the scruff of the neck towards the shore, sitting cosily on his back, and making him swim as she did so. Meantime, at the head of a whole shoal of mackerel and

other fish, a creature whom she firmly believed to be her old friend the Turbot, rose up in the sea and came darting towards her as if to prevent her from either escaping or succouring her husband.

But Molly was equal to the occasion. Without the delay of a second she pronounced the word 'Wharlmone!' which sent the fishes hurry-scurrying off as fast as they could. To right and empty the boat, however, was not such an easy matter, and meanwhile John was swimming in a listless way towards the shore, evidently under the complete control of his witch rider. Molly could swim pretty well, but she had the boat to look after and dared not leave it; so she raised herself out of the water as well as she could by laying hold of it, and shouted at the top of her voice, 'John! Wharlmone! I say, come back!' Instantly John stopped, and then dived as if he had been shot, in which action he dislodged the damsel from his back, who yelled lustily as she found herself struggling in the water some twenty yards from shore.

John, meanwhile, rose again nearer to his wife, and now came straight to her assistance. Between them they managed to right the boat, which they presently succeeded in emptying of the water which remained in her, and then set off rowing homewards once more.

Not one whit was Molly moved by the screams of the drowning witch, which, however, attracted a number of fish, to whom she was fair game; and the last that Molly saw of her was the great pool of water splashing to and fro, and fishes jumping around it in great glee. Whether she was drowned or not the fisherman's wife neither knew nor cared. She made her

husband take an oar, and they pulled together with such good will that in a very short time they ran the boat on to the beach very near their own cottage door. Then Molly and John got out, dragged the boat up a bit on the beach, and once more entered their cottage together. And when they were safely there, poor Molly sat down on the nearest chair and cried as if her heart would break at the thought of all she had gone through. John comforted her as well as he could, and after a while she got better. Still, she said, she should never be as happy as she was before, since evil habits were hard to get rid of, and now John had once been on that island, he might find it difficult to keep away.

Whilst they conversed in this manner Molly prepared tea, of which they both partook, and then, although it was getting late, she declared that she could not possibly sleep without thanking the Rabbit, who had proved so kind a friend. As John could not, in her opinion, be safely left behind, and was, moreover, quite as much indebted to the Wise Rabbit as she was, it was agreed that he should accompany his wife to the old-thorn tree, to thank their mutual benefactor. Accordingly the two set off together, and marched quietly up to the place whence Molly had derived such wise and successful instructions. With a face beaming with delight she stood near to the thorn-tree, and said in joyous tones :—

'Wise Rabbit! we be come to say how thankful we be to you. I have got my John back all through you, and here he is with me. If you could only tell

me how to prevent those witches from getting of him again, I would be mortal obliged, so I would.'

After a moment's pause the old voice spoke once more, and the fisherman and his wife eagerly listened to the words it uttered :—

'When mortal man by witch is slaved,
By wile alone can he be saved,
And by "the word" of magic power
Alike in witch or warlock's bower.
Once freed, he still shall free remain,
Ne'er by such arts enslaved again.
And those whose malice has been foiled,
Whose plans are neutralised and spoiled,
No more have power to vex the man
Nor any of his kindred clan.
Wherefore, good dame, attend to me!
Thy foes thou ne'er again wilt see :
Defeated, they will elsewhere fly,
And leave to thee the victory!'

The voice ceased, and Molly, though much pleased with the purport of its words, earnestly desired further explanation of their meaning. This, however, she could by no means obtain. Not another word would the Rabbit say, and she and her husband were obliged to go home satisfied with what they had heard. That same night there came a terrible thunder-storm. Thunder at least there was, awful to hear, and the lightning flashed more vividly than the fisherman and his wife ever remembered to have seen it before. Yet not a drop of rain or hail fell, and the night was dry and sultry all through.

The first thing next morning the fisherman and his wife walked out on the beach and looked towards the sea. Wonder of wonders! There was nothing

to be seen of the Witches' Island but a dense mass of smoke. During the day a breeze sprang up which swept away the smoke, and showed a complete desert where had been the woods of stunted oak. Evidently the brushwood had caught fire in the night, and the whole place had been consumed by the flames. So said the people on the coast, but John and Molly knew something beyond *that*. It was plain enough to them that the Witches had determined to leave the country, because, as the Wise Rabbit had said, their power was broken, as regarded that neighbourhood at least, by the escape of the man they had enslaved; and what was more probable than that they had set fire to their island home, resolved that no one else should enjoy the woods and shady retreats from which they were about to be banished? However this may be, it is certain that these fearful creatures were never seen any more upon that part of the coast.

Molly lived to a good old age, but she saw no more of them, neither was she ever addressed by a Turbot, comforted by a Sandpiper, or instructed by a Wise Rabbit during the remainder of her existence. The principal event of John's life was, that he gave up smuggling shortly after these events had occurred. They had made him think seriously upon all matters, and he came to the wise conclusion that as witches were people who cared for and respected no laws at all, he had better be as different to them as he possibly could; therefore, for the future he respected the revenue laws, avoided all smuggling, and took to honest fishing. Being one of the best fishermen on

the coast, he got on very well at the business, and he and Molly lived very comfortably together for many years. But Molly always had a hold on him in respect of the event of which I have been telling you, and if ever she saw him talking to any other person of the fairer sex whom she didn't happen to like, she was down upon him like a shot with some words which brought him at once to a properly submissive frame of mind; recalling to his recollection the dangers he had passed through, and the happy escape which, through her instrumentality, he had had from the Witches' Island.

V.

HARRY'S DREAM.

It was a warm day, in fact decidedly hot. So thought the sheep as they shrank from the open field, and clustered together beneath the shade of the elm-trees which sent forth their spreading branches in a manner which no sheep worthy of the name could fail to appreciate; so, too, thought the oxen as they stood in the shallow water of the river ford, and bellowed out their gratitude as the cooling stream flowed round their legs; aye, and so thought the boys who were playing a cricket match on Northwell Green, and although everybody knows that 'it is never too hot for cricket,' I fancy they would have been glad enough if the sun would have hid his face behind a good thick cloud for a while and left off shining down so fiercely on their heads. He wouldn't though, but kept on shining his brightest and strongest, until the cricketers became so baked and broiled, that it was a wonder they went on playing. But English boys never give in, and in spite of all the sun could do, they persevered in their match and worked as hard as if it was the main object of their lives. Well, and so it was, just for that day. The village of Northwell was pitted against Mr. Binning's school from Prye, a small

town, as all the world knows, not two miles from Northwell, and one which boasted a school which called itself a college, and the boys whereof, as boys should be, were much given to cricket. The two elevens were supposed to be pretty equally matched, for Northwell had a very tolerable club of its own, fostered and supported as it was by the squire's two sons, Harry and George Sanderson, who both agreed that there was nothing in the whole world to be compared with cricket, and no such glorious fun as a cricket-match. On the present occasion, however, Harry's 'glorious fun' had been cut short by the decision of the umpire belonging to the other side, who had given him 'out'—'leg before wicket.'

Now I have been given to understand that there are three individuals never yet encountered in society :—A man who thinks himself a fool, a woman who believes she is absolutely ugly, or a boy who is satisfied that he was fairly given 'out' leg before wicket. Harry, being no exception to this general rule, was, I am sorry to say, in no very good temper when he left the wicket. What made it more provoking was the fact that his side only wanted twenty runs to win, and there were only two more wickets to follow him. He had been 'well in,' and, but for this misfortune, felt certain that he could have won the match off his own bat. But fate, and the umpire, prevented this, and Harry, too much of a gentleman to show any ill-temper in the field, retired to his tent in no very amiable frame of mind. Nor was the latter by any means improved by the remarks and condolences of his friends. 'A horrid shame!' 'I

declare it wasn't out.' 'That old muff Watkins, he isn't fit to be umpire,' and a score more of similar remarks greeted the boy, and were scarcely calculated to make him alter his opinion on the matter. He watched the game, however, with great interest, in the hope that the fortunes of the day were not yet irretrievably lost.

Young Smith of the Mill had followed him, and scoring two from the first ball of the Prye bowler, had raised the hopes of his side, which, however, fell again as the next ball lowered his wicket. Seventeen to 'tie,' eighteen to 'win,' and all depended upon Jones and Mopson, the last two of the Northwell players. Jones hits a full pitch for four amid loud cheering from the Northwellites. Little Mopson tips a ball in among the 'slips' which they cleverly let pass, and two more runs are obtained, then a wide is bowled, and the score shows ten to 'tie'—eleven to win. All is anxiety as the play continues. Jones gives a 'chance' to cover 'point' which is not taken, and two runs are the result; the next ball is 'blocked' steadily, and the third flies away to leg for two more runs. Six to tie and seven to win, when the 'long-stop' misses the ball, and little Mopson calls Jones to run. They *do* run and get a bye, when, as ill-luck will have it, they fancy they can run a second, and the long-stop, with a shot from afar, sends Jones' stumps flying while he is a full yard off from home, and victory rests with the Prye eleven by five runs! Only by five runs! If Harry had not been given 'out' in that manner, in all probability the result would have been different. So felt the Northwell eleven and their friends, and so felt Harry himself, and he could not avoid a sensation

of disgust towards the unfriendly umpire who had so materially contributed to the untoward result. Being of a warm temperament, in which he closely resembled the day, Harry's irritation was increased by the 'chaff' of one or two of the Prye boys, and became at last so great that he could face it no longer. No doubt it was weak and foolish of him, but so it was; and as the match was over and there was no occasion for him to stay any longer on the ground, he slipped away from the busy crowd on the green into his father's park hard by.

Squire Sanderson had a handsome mansion and a beautiful park, in which much of Harry's and his brother's leisure time was passed, and which was certainly a first-rate place for a boy or anybody else to pass his leisure time in, if he had the opportunity. Like some other English parks, it was tolerably full of oak-trees and fern, and the combination of these two things would go far to make beautiful, at least in the summer time, a place which was otherwise flat and ugly. This, however, was not the case with Northwell Park. The oak-trees and fern only added to the attractions of scenery which would have been lovely without either. The ground was tossed about in beautiful undulations; the lake, and also several smaller ponds, varied the scenery, and the park abounded with picturesque views and bits of landscape which would have been delicious to the eye of an artist, or in fact to the eye of anybody else who had an atom of taste.

But its chief beauty were the two large woods which bounded it on either side: they were such

woods as are not to be met with every day. They were full of trees of enormous size and of unknown age. Many of them had been pollarded, and so from their crown sprang up sundry branches, each of which was a small tree in itself, overshadowing the ground far and wide on either side. These trees were principally hornbeam, beech, and ash, but a goodly sprinkling of oaks was intermixed with the others. As spring advanced, these woods presented to the eye a perfect carpet of blue-bells and other woodland flowers, most pleasant to behold in their fresh beauty and the variety of their colouring. Then gradually the fern grew up and covered the greater part of the earth within the precincts of the wood, where its green contrasted with that of the leaves above it, and the eye rested gratefully upon the beauty of both. What could be more delightful than to wander through such woods in the height of summer? At some places the fern was higher than the head of an ordinary-sized man, and as the overhanging branches of the trees, drooping with their ponderous load of leaves, touched its uprearing crest, it was not easy to make a passage through it. At other spots it was thinner, and anyone who knew the woods well could wind about in the tracks made by the deer, and enjoy an exceedingly beautiful and wild walk without keeping to the bridle road which ran through each of the woods.

It was indeed a glorious place. Now and then a startled doe, with her fawn by his side, would start from her lair in the fern, give half-a-dozen jumps with her feet together, as if moved by mechanism, stand staring at you with doubtful eyes for a moment or

two, and then, with a little grunt of suspicious indignation at being disturbed, plunge again into the thick fern and disappear from your sight. Then again, with a noise that made you start in spite of yourself, the woodpigeon would suddenly burst out of the thick foliage just above your head, where she had been quietly dozing in the tree, enjoying the rays of the sun shining in upon the thick leafy screen she had chosen for her afternoon's meditation. Dash, rush, crash, out she would come just as you were close under the tree, and for a moment you would wonder what the noise could be all about. Then rabbits innumerable would cross your path; squirrels would chatter above your head; the jays would let you know their powers of imitation if you stopped to listen to them without their discovering you, and then, when roused, would give vent to the discordant note by which they are generally known, and fly shrieking away to hide themselves in the dense foliage. In short, both animate and inanimate nature gave a charm to these woods which everybody with any taste at all would appreciate and enjoy.

This was the scenery into which Harry entered, as soon as he was in his father's park. He carried his hat in his hand, which he swung to and fro as he walked along, meditating on the events of the day, and intending to stroll quietly through the woods and then home across the park, instead of taking the footpath which led direct to the house from the green without passing through the wood. As he walked and thought, it was not unnatural that the conduct of the umpire should form part of the subject of his

meditations, and at last, coming to a mossy bank where was a clear space beneath the branches of a mighty beech, he threw himself down thereupon for a little rest, and after listening to the woodland sounds about him for a few seconds, again found his thoughts reverting to the event which had so disturbed him, and almost involuntarily exclaimed aloud, 'Confound that old ass Watkins!'

I hope nobody will find fault with me for venturing to chronicle this naughty observation. There are some critics so fastidious that they blame the thoughtless or worse than thoughtless writer who ventures to make his heroes or heroines say anything which is not perfectly proper as well as grammatical. But, unfortunately, people are *not* always perfectly proper, let alone grammatical, in their utterances, and I do not pretend to relate only the sayings and doings of people who always said and did exactly what was proper and correct. I should, myself, find it dull and insipid to do so, and possibly there are others in this wicked world who might agree with me. It must not be supposed for a moment that I defend Harry for having made the above observation regarding the hostile umpire. No doubt he was wrong, but unfortunately he said it all the same, and I can only tell what really happened as it was told to me by those who know. Again, then, do I respectfully chronicle the fact that Harry, with some emphasis and energy, observed, at the particular moment of which we are now speaking, 'Confound that old ass Watkins!'

To his infinite surprise, the words were hardly out

of his mouth before a voice remarked, as if in answer to the observation he had just let fall, 'Never give way to temper.'

The voice was in no respects curious or uncommon, though the circumstances under which it was uttered were undoubtedly both the one and the other. The spot upon which Harry was seated was far away from any foot-path: no one had the slightest right to be there save members of the family, or, indeed, the park-keepers, and it was unlikely that such an observation as had just been made would have fallen from one of the latter. Harry, therefore, was greatly surprised, not to say startled, at an occurrence so totally unexpected. The voice seemed to come from some quarter very near to where he was sitting, and accordingly he turned his head right and left to discern who could be the speaker.

He had not far to look. At a short distance from him, in fact, from one of the branches of the very tree under which he had stationed himself, a little old gentleman was dangling. Yes, dangling; and what is more extraordinary, dangling by the feet, and swinging his arms leisurely to and fro as if he rather enjoyed it. His feet were twisted somehow or other over the branch, and there he hung as comfortably as if he had been used to it all his life, as indeed might possibly have been the case. His attitude was indeed extraordinary, especially in a person of his time of life, for he was evidently advanced in years, at all events sufficiently so to justify the appellation of 'old gentleman' which I have ventured to give him. But his dress was no less extraordinary than his

attitude. At least, so Harry thought it, for it was not customary in those parts to see people clad entirely in brown velvet, and such was the old gentleman's costume. Brown velvet shooting-coat and waistcoat, brown velvet knickerbockers, and a wide-awake of similar material which he held in one of his hands, probably because it would otherwise have fallen to the ground as he swung with his head downwards.

Harry perceived at a glance that his new acquaintance was no ordinary personage, although who or what he might be would have puzzled a wiser head than Master Harry's to have determined. However, Eton boys are never disconcerted at trifles, and Harry, being an Eton boy, was not much put out, however much he might have been surprised, by the address of the individual in question. Perhaps his first idea was to be somewhat offended at being so coolly accosted by a perfect stranger, but this feeling did not last long, and the more so because he felt that there was some force in the advice so unceremoniously tendered. Though not really angry, he had certainly felt more vexed than he liked to own at the umpire's decision, and the observation which he had uttered aloud might well have led a casual hearer to come to the conclusion that he *had* slightly given way to a temper which it would have been better to have restrained. So, after the first moment of surprise, he burst out into a hearty fit of laughter, without saying a word.

'That's better!' observed the old gentleman; 'that's *much* better, my boy! Laughter is a capital cure for

a fit of the spleen. I like to hear you laugh: it does me good!'

'I am very glad to hear it, sir,' replied Harry, who had now partially recovered his composure, and then paused, hardly knowing what he ought to say next.

But Eton, although her enemies say that the classical knowledge which she imparts to her sons is not always carried away by them in such quantity and quality as could be wished, and although the mathematical instruction which they receive has been known to require supplementary care, never fails to teach politeness to all those whose natures allow them to be the recipients of this useful lesson. Harry, therefore, as an Eton boy, was bound to be polite, and he felt that he had already gone near to commit a breach of good manners in laughing so loudly at the stranger without making any further answer to his first observation. Sitting up, therefore, upon the moss, he said with a respectful air, as was becoming in a boy addressing one so much his senior in age:

'Really, sir, you must excuse my apparent rudeness, but your first observation startled me so much that I hardly knew what to say or do, and it is so unusual for us to see gentlemen hanging head downwards in this wood that I positively could not help laughing.'

'No offence, Harry, no offence at all,' rejoined the other; 'and I am glad to find, by the readiness and heartiness of your laugh, that you were not so much out of temper with that fellow Watkins as I had supposed. It *was* a bore, though, I must confess, to be given "out" like that!'

Harry was more than ever surprised now. The old

gentleman, then, knew his name, and all about the cricket-match, and what good reason he had to be vexed with Watkins. Who could he be? where could he have come from? Harry was very certain that he had not been among the lookers-on at the match, for he could not have failed to observe anyone who had appeared there in so strange a dress. He could not make it out at all, and looked hard at the old gentleman for several seconds before he spoke again.

'Well,' said the other after a while, 'you'll know me again, I should hope!'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' replied Harry, 'I was just thinking where I had seen you before.'

'You *never* saw me before,' interrupted the old gentleman; 'so it's no use thinking about *that*. I live in this wood, though, and perhaps you may see me again some day, for I have taken rather a fancy to you.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Harry. 'I am very glad to hear it; but pray whereabouts do you live? I know the wood pretty well; of course I do, because it is in my own father's park, but I never knew that anybody lived there. I thought the deer and rabbits and birds and squirrels had it all to themselves.'

'Sanderson Minor,' gravely observed the old gentleman, 'there are a great many things which you do not know yet, and a great many more which you very likely never *will* know at all. I have told you already that I live in this wood. Never mind how or where. Perhaps I live in the trees and fern during the warm summer months, and coil myself up in a hollow tree like a dormouse all the winter. Perhaps I don't. Anyhow, you see me here to-day, and that must be enough for

you for the present. However, since we have met so conveniently, we may as well have a little more conversation before we part, which I think I should like to carry on in rather a different position from that which I occupy at present.' So saying, the speaker suddenly swung up and caught with his hands the branch from which he had been hanging, and by this means was enabled to let himself down so as to fall on his feet. Then, crossing his legs under him, he sat down within three or four yards of Harry, put on his wide-awake, folded his arms across his breast, and looked the boy steadily in the face.

Harry regarded all these proceedings with great equanimity, and began to wonder what would happen next. He had not, however, much opportunity for wondering. A drowsy, dreamy feeling stole gradually over him under the gaze of the old gentleman. The trees, the fern, the strange little figure before him, all seemed to grow dull, shadowy, and indistinct, and the last thing Harry remembered was that a gratified and triumphant smile stole over his companion's face as if he had completely succeeded in some desired object. With that smile before him, Harry lost all consciousness for a time.

When he awoke it was to gaze upon a scene entirely different from that upon which he had closed his eyes. He was lying upon a small sofa which fitted into a recess in the window of a drawing-room. The window was open, but before he looked out of it he took a survey of the room itself, first rubbing his eyes hard to assure himself that he was really awake. The room was beautifully furnished. Costly mirrors

hung upon the walls, which were also adorned with first-rate pictures by the best artists of the best schools. There were tables of different kinds of expensive woods; chairs of various sizes and shapes, covered with rose-coloured chintz; cabinets filled with rare and precious objects; all these things met his eye as he gazed around him in mute surprise and admiration at the exquisite taste which was everywhere displayed, and the evidence of wealth which he saw on all sides. A soft carpet of beautiful pattern covered the floor, the mantel-piece was of white marble, on the front of which was a wonderfully carved figure of Cleopatra, with the fatal asp about to be applied to her breast, a marvellous work of art which caught the eye immediately, and invited it to rest with pleasure upon so beautiful a design. The room was lighted by three windows in the large bow which formed its front, and in the centre window was the sofa upon which Harry found himself.

Having completed his survey of the room, he looked out of the window upon a beautiful lawn, entirely surrounded on three sides by a circle of magnificent rhododendrons, which must have been most delightful to look upon a few months earlier in the year. As it was August, however, they had gone off after the usual fashion of rhododendrons, and had only their green leaves to remind you of what they had been in the days of their beauty. In the front part of the lawn, facing the house, there was nothing to intercept Harry's view, and it was upon this that he fixed his eyes after the first moment. Several gardeners were employed in the seasonable practice of

'bedding out,' which employment they followed with the greater assiduity from the fact that they were overlooked by a lady and gentleman to whom apparently the place belonged. The lady sat in a large bath-chair, the head of which had been drawn forward so as to shield her from the sun, whilst she could thus sit comfortably enough with her face to the gardeners and superintend their work without being exposed to the heat and glare of the summer's day.

Upon her head she wore a straw hat, about which there was nothing remarkable, and her dress was of exactly one and the same colour all over, which colour was, like the coverings of the chairs, rose-colour, and seemed to Harry rather smart to wear in the garden in the middle of the day. Her companion, however, was none other than the little old gentleman whom Harry had seen in the wood, and his dress was precisely similar to that which he had worn upon his first appearance. Brown from head to foot was he, and had his 'wideawake' of the same colour upon his head. He was giving directions to the gardeners as they went on with their work, and appeared to take a lively interest in their proceedings.

On looking more closely at the men who were working, Harry could not but be astonished at what he saw. Their bodies, arms, and legs appeared to be in every respect similar to those of ordinary mortals, but instead of heads, he could see nothing upon the shoulders of each of them but something closely resembling a pudding. Yes; it certainly was so; the man nearest him had a most undoubted plum-pudding instead of a head, and the next to him had

something more like a boiled tapioca pudding than anything else. Still the men worked on just as if they had regular heads like other people, and the puddings never broke, or crumbled, or fell off, but kept on the shoulders quite well, as if they had been used to it all their lives. Harry was never so astonished in his life, but before he could say or do anything to express his astonishment, it was greatly increased by the sight of another marvel. The gardeners, as I have said, were 'bedding out,' or, in other words, planting 'annuals' in the little beds upon the lawn, which were fantastically cut about in different shapes and sizes. But the plants which they were putting in at the moment when Harry began to observe them bore a curious resemblance to men's heads, and when one of the men drew back to let the little old gentleman see how he was getting on, Harry saw a number of heads planted in the bed at which he had been working, every head of which bore an unmistakable resemblance to that of his old enemy, the Umpire Watkins! Yes! Facing every way, so that a person walking round the bed might have the advantage of studying the features of his beautiful and intellectual visage from every possible point of view, there was Watkins!

How one man could have so many heads, how he could be alive and smiling (as the faces were) after having had his head cut off, or how indeed he ever got there at all, whether with one head or five hundred, were questions which mightily perplexed Harry, and which he found himself totally unable to answer. As he gazed and wondered, with perhaps some shade

of pity for the luckless umpire who had apparently expiated all his offences at last, and would no longer be able to give boys out unfairly, a ray of light was shed upon the subject by the lady, who languidly remarked to her companion,

'There, I really think that head does very nicely. How very well it looks, when it grins with that complacent, self-satisfied air! I am so glad we have got him!'

'You may thank the boy for *that*!' cried the old gentleman. 'If he hadn't said, "Confound that old ass Watkins!" just at that particular time and place, we should never have caught the old fellow at all. But now we've been able to "confound" him indeed. What a comfort it is when one is able to take people at their words, and do the things they say they wish—though very likely they don't wish them at all, only they never know their own minds!'

'True,' remarked his companion: 'Mortals are queer creatures. It is lucky for them that there are only certain places in the world, and those few in number, where we have the power to take advantage of their words, or they would have many more troubles than now.'

'Certainly they would,' observed the other. 'At least some of them would have a rough time of it. But how should *we* manage in such a case? We should have more to attend to than any Fairy could manage.'

Harry had listened to the dialogue thus far with great attention, and had gathered from it that he himself had been, unwittingly, the cause of the mis-

fortune which seemed to have befallen poor Watkins. But when by the concluding words of the old gentleman, he gathered the fact that it was (as he had already suspected) his fate to have fallen into the hands of Fairies, he began to feel exceedingly doubtful as to his own position. It did not seem as if any evil was intended to him, at least for the present, and indeed the old gentleman had volunteered the statement that he had taken a fancy to him. But people who were capable of cutting off umpires' heads, multiplying them many-fold, and then bedding them out as plants in their gardens, might at any time deal in a similarly unpleasant and singular manner with a person who was *not* an umpire. Therefore Harry began to think that it would behove him to be careful and cautious, lest the wrath of the Fairies should be turned upon him. The darkest suspicion, also, arose in his mind about the heads of the gardeners, who were very unlikely to have been born in the condition in which he now saw them. So, upon the whole, the boy felt rather uncomfortable, and would sooner have been lying in the tent on Northwell Green, or in the playing-fields at Eton, than upon the sofa in that magnificently furnished drawing-room.

At that moment, however, whilst he was still in a state of perplexity and doubt as to speaking or not speaking to the lady and gentleman, so as to call their attention to his presence, an uncontrollable desire to sneeze settled the point for him by causing him to make such a noise as immediately induced both the one and the other to turn their heads in the direction of the window.

'Ha!' cried the brown gentleman, 'our young friend is awake. Come, Cinderella, let us go and talk to him.'

Upon this the lady without more ado stepped out of her bath-chair, and in so doing exhibited a remarkably small foot with such a tiny slipper upon it that Harry began to think he had before his eyes the veritable Cinderella of the olden story. The old gentleman offered her his arm, and they walked together straight up to the window at which Harry was now sitting upright on his sofa. Then he perceived for the first time that the lady was somewhat smaller than the gentleman, and that her features bore an extraordinary resemblance to those of his own sister May, of whom he was excessively fond, but whom he never expected to find walking arm in arm with a brown gentleman in what was evidently a fairy garden. But not only was it like May but it absolutely *was* May: Harry was perfectly sure of it; so sure, indeed, that as soon as the pair came close to the window, which they presently did, he shouted out in a tone of surprise, 'Why, May? is that you? How ever did you come here, and what are you doing?'

The person addressed received his words in a strange and novel manner. She sat plump down upon a rosebush (which to most persons would have been exceedingly inconvenient) and began to cry; whilst the old gentleman, as if it was a thing of every-day occurrence, to which he was quite accustomed, deliberately drew from his pocket a clean brown pocket-handkerchief, gracefully unfolded it and began with tender care gravely to dry the tears as they

coursed down her cheeks. Then stopping for a moment, he turned with the utmost gravity to Harry, and holding up his forefinger in a warning manner, remarked, 'Hush! *pray* be quiet! don't mind her! It will all be right presently. She is often like this in the fruit-season,' and then returned to his occupation.

Harry gazed upon the two with increasing wonder. What connection there could be between his words, the fruit-season, and May's tears (for it certainly *was* May) he had not the least idea, but as the old gentleman told him to be quiet, he saw no reason why he should not obey. So he waited patiently for several moments while the crying and tear-drying continued, when all of a sudden the lady jumped up with quite a radiant smile upon her countenance, and observed in a remarkably cheerful tone, 'Buzzing bumble-bees bravely beating briary bramble bushes for a burnt Barnstable baronet:' say that fast three times after me without a mistake and I'll give you a sixpence!'

Harry was extremely surprised at this observation, which, however, appeared nowise to disconcert the little old gentleman, who immediately desisted from his employment, and began to say the words after May as fast as he could, failing signally in his attempt to do so without mistakes.

'Stupid!' at length she said, and then turning to Harry, called out, 'Now, you try!'

Harry did as he was told, though he didn't see much fun in it, and thought that the old words, 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper,' presented much greater difficulties to rapid pronunciation. He ventured to suggest this, upon which May pouted and

said she shouldn't play any more, and the old gentleman told Harry that he was evidently no judge of such matters. At this Harry was rather nettled, not considering that the question was one sufficiently deep to require age and experience in order to understand it thoroughly. He ventured to hint as much to his brown friend, upon which the latter looked up at him calmly and asked the following startling question :—

'How long have you been at Eton?'

'More than two years,' replied Harry.

'And how many times have you been flogged?' demanded the inquisitive old gentleman.

Harry coloured, for though he had, like other boys, been in a few trifling scrapes which had terminated in an acquaintance with the head master's right arm, and was not ashamed of the fact, yet he did not care to be questioned about it by a comparative stranger, and was at first doubtful how to answer. On the whole, however, he thought that he might as well speak out; so he replied, with as careless an air as he could assume at the moment, 'Oh, two or three times, about like other fellows, I suppose. I dare say you were flogged in your time, too, sir?'

'*I* flogged!' cried the little brown gentleman, 'I should just think so! From the time I left my cradle up to a moment too recent to be mentioned, I have been continually becoming acquainted with personal chastisement. I wrote a song about it once, which I may as well sing to you at once, as I feel musically inclined.' So saying, he broke off into the following lively ditty to the tune of that beautiful melody, 'Over the sea.'

I.

Over her knee, over her knee,
How my old grandmother used to spank me;
Over her knee, over her knee,
When I was quite a small boy!
It was spank, spank, spank!
No use was it kicking, for on she went licking,
With spank, spank, spank!
The thing she quite used to enjoy!
(*Chorus*) Then it's over her knee, &c.

II.

Over her knee, over her knee,
Oft she would turn me as if for a spree,
Over her knee, over her knee,
Turn me again and again.
It was spank, spank, spank!
In vain was my crying, she kept on applying
The spank, spank, spank!
Oh, it was terrible pain!
(*Chorus*) Then it's over her knee, &c.

III.

When I was free down from her knee
Naughty again I was certain to be,
Then she took me back on her knee,
Acting the same as before;
It was spank, spank, spank!
Wretched young fellow, oh, how I did bellow!
Still spank, spank, spank!
O, 'twas no end of a bore!
(*Chorus*) When over her knee, &c.

'There!' cried the little brown gentleman as he came to an end of his song, 'I call that a sensible kind of a ditty, and what is more, it is strictly founded upon fact, which is more than many of my friends can say who write songs and stories. Now, then, can't

you sing a song in your turn, or say something amusing? You seem as dull as ditch-water to-day.'

'Thank you!' said Harry with a laugh; 'I would sing if I could, but I really can't. I don't belong to the musical fellows at Eton. Now if Ronaldson were here, he would sing you "Simon the Cellarer" in no time—he's the chap to sing, and as for making you laugh, to see *him* laugh would set you off for a week, he is famous for his laugh.'

'Who is he?' asked the lady, whose attention had now been attracted by the conversation, to which she had hitherto paid marked disregard.

'Oh! one of the sixth form at Eton,' said Harry.

'What are they?' she demanded.

'*What* are they?' said Harry, somewhat indignant at there being anybody who did not know what a sixth-form boy at Eton was, 'why, the head fellows in the school of course!'

'No "of course" at all,' interposed the little old gentleman. 'The head fellows must be the *first* fellows, and therefore the *first* form and not the *sixth* form must contain the head fellows.'

'Oh no!' cried Harry, 'you don't understand.'

'*I* don't understand!' bawled the other at the top of his voice. 'How dare you say so? I understand everything and know everything best, and therefore either I'm quite right or else Eton has made some stupid mistake in the matter. At all events, the great thing is that *I am right*; so pray say no more about it, especially as this singing fool of yours is not here, thank goodness.'

Harry was very much tempted to reply, but thought

that under the circumstances he had better refrain from doing so, and accordingly contented himself with attributing the contemptuous epithet applied to his friend by the old gentleman as merely the proverbial jealousy of one singer towards another who had been praised in his hearing. Wishing therefore to change the subject, he turned round to his two companions, and addressing them with much respect, said, 'Will you kindly tell me how it is that your gardeners have such curious heads?'

'Curious heads!' cried May, 'I don't see it at all. They have the heads bestowed upon them by their masters, who, in a properly enchanted place, called them "Pudding-headed fellows," and hence the result. I don't see what they have to complain of, they do very well.'

'But,' rejoined Harry, 'what right had their masters to make them thus?'

'My boy,' remarked the little brown gentleman, 'do not seek to know too much. However, I may frankly tell you that their masters did not know that this result would follow their application of such an epithet to their servants. They knew not, any more than the men themselves, that they were standing upon an enchanted spot, where a wish formed by one mortal with respect to another, or an expression applied by one person to another, would instantly be followed by practical results. But as no mortals *do* know where these enchanted places happen to be situated, they ought to be much more careful than they are as to what they say or wish about other people. No one knows the effect a careless word may have.'

This struck Harry as being a sensible remark, and,

associating it with the state of Watkins the umpire, he began to feel rather uneasy in his mind. Probably his countenance gave some indication of his feelings, for the old gentleman presently exclaimed, 'Come, don't be downcast or unhappy; we don't like that kind of thing here. Wouldn't you like to see the gardens?'

Harry saw no reason for saying anything but 'Yes' to this proposal, and the three set off together at once. They crossed the lawn, during which process Harry carefully averted his eyes from the border of Watkins' heads, but only to observe that many other countenances of people, known and unknown to him, appeared to be placed in a similar position in other borders, which rather relieved his mind, as showing that the unhappy umpire would at least have company in his punishment. Then, passing through a narrow passage cut through the rhododendrons, they came on to another larger lawn, on one side of which was an enormous extent of glass—green-houses and hot-houses, peach-houses and grape-houses, as Harry thought, enough to have supplied all Eton through the whole summer half and even then have left plenty of fruit over. But when he came near, he found he had been mistaken. These were not houses for ordinary fruit, but contained new and extraordinary plants. The first house was completely filled with plants the like of which Harry had never seen before and about which he eagerly questioned his companions.

'Oh!' said the little brown gentleman, 'these are Observation-trees: don't you see their names written on the stem of each?'

'Yes,' replied the boy; 'but what do they mean? and how do they grow here? I never saw them at home.'

'Certainly not,' returned the other, 'because home and Fairyland are two different places. The Observation-tree springs from the observations which people let fall in the world of which you are a member. If they are not broken by the fall, Fairies very often pick them up and plant them, when, according to the intention and feeling with which they came from the person who was first responsible for them, they either flourish or the reverse. See for instance this tree. "What a fine day it is!" was the seed-observation, and as it was probably a true remark, uttered with sincerity, you see how it has blossomed out and how the observation is enlarged and elaborated on many of the buds.'

Harry looked closely and observed that each of the buds of the tree had some kind of remark appertaining to the subject of the parent-observation. 'It is warm, bright, and pleasant.' "The sun is cheering everything with his bright rays.' 'The air is really delicious,' and many other similar inscriptions.

'This,' said the little brown gentleman, 'is a very common observation, and we have more specimens than we care for. Here, however, is another, of which there are many and great varieties.'

As he spoke, he pointed to a plant growing near, upon the stem of which was marked, 'How d'ye do? I am so *very* glad to see you!' Another plant of the same sort was growing side by side with this, and Harry observed a marked difference between the two.

Upon the first, where the observation let fall had been perfectly sincere, there was much blossom, and the buds, which were numerous, were inscribed with such words as 'It is really so very long since we met.' 'It is always a pleasure to me when we run against each other.' 'How pleasant it is for two friends to meet unexpectedly!' The second, on the contrary, having evidently been a mere polite remark with no real feeling in it, had grown up a sickly plant, with little blossom and few buds, the latter bearing inscriptions already blighted, such as 'I never expected to meet *you* here.' 'How tiresome one's acquaintances are, meeting one at every corner!' 'Dear me, what a bore! here is somebody else one must speak to!' remarks which may often have crossed the minds of people who have saluted their acquaintances with civil words without civil thoughts, but which it would be exceedingly disagreeable to have paraded in the form of buds on a tree immediately after they had been made. Harry told his companions as much, but they only laughed, and said it was to expose the humbug of mortals that Fairies kept such things, and that they were useful as a warning to the inhabitants of Fairyland itself.

The next glass-house was entirely filled with a particular kind of shrub which the little brown gentleman informed Harry was called the Good-Intention-tree. There were numerous specimens, 'for,' said the owner, 'so many people have good intentions in your world that we encounter no difficulty whatever in obtaining as many as we like. Some, you see, blossom and come to maturity as well as we could wish, but

with the great majority it is otherwise. The plant is exceedingly tender and difficult to rear, and all the more so because it always looks so healthy at first that one is tempted to think it requires but little care. The very reverse, however, is the case. Nothing is harder than really to bring a "good intention" to perfection. Various kinds of worms assail it, known here as the "temptation worms," and more frequently still it falls a victim to the blight which we call "Indolence," and so the promised fruit is never gathered.'

Harry listened and wondered at the account of this plant, and would have asked some more questions about it, only that his companions hurried him on to the next compartment, which, like the last, was one of considerable size.

'This,' said the brown gentleman, 'is the Hope-house, which contains some curious varieties of a plant which, while life lasts, is always found growing in the breast of man, which is its favourite soil. Here you may observe some very fine and thriving plants, which we call Realised Hopes, whilst these which seem blighted and dying are Disappointed Hopes, and these pale and sickly-looking plants, which appear as if they might either fade or recover according to the care with which they are tended, are known by the name of Hope Deferred, a most trying plant to rear.'

As he spoke, he led the way into another compartment, in which were a number of trees with plenty of branches, but with scarcely any leaves to speak of.

'This,' said he, 'is the Repentance-tree, of which we have, as you may see, a vast number. It is one extremely common in your world, and one which we

have no difficulty in rearing here in any quantity we please. Its peculiar quality is that in nine cases out of ten it buds and blossoms too late to be of any use. If we could but get it to come out now, in the warm summer, its leaves would be the greatest comfort by way of shade from the rays of the summer sun, but instead of this, it persists in remaining with bare branches now, and only puts forth its leaves in the winter, when the sun has lost its power, and when its shade can be of little service to anybody.'

As he spoke, the little gentleman opened another door and remarked to the boy, 'Here you may see another curious species of plant. This is the Dream-tree, from which we supply people in your world with all kinds of dreams, some of which, I can assure you, are very pleasant and others equally disagreeable. Look at this horrible specimen with all kinds of ugly faces on its leaves: that is a tree of alarming dreams. There again, the tree which sparkles so is one which only bears cheerful, happy dreams: this kind is much rarer than the other.'

'But,' said Harry, 'ever so many of the trees seem to be growing root-upwards, how does that come about?'

'Don't you know?' interrupted May eagerly, as if anxious to display her superior information. 'Silly boy! Dreams generally "go by contraries:" so of course the trees have to grow topsy-turvy in order to enable them to do so.'

Although Harry did not feel perfectly satisfied with this explanation, he deemed it inexpedient to enquire further, and so they passed on through several

more houses, containing many curious specimens of plants and trees of which he had never heard before. One which rather amused him was the 'Letter House,' in which grew a number of specimens of the letter H, which people in his own world had let drop, and which had immediately been planted by the Fairies. They had not, however, so many specimens of this sort as they could wish, remarked the little brown gentleman, owing to the fact of there being so many world-people who, instead of dropping the letter, seized it and clapped it on in words where it was not wanted, by which means a great many letter-H plants were absorbed, which would otherwise have found their way to Fairyland hot-houses.

By this time Harry had had nearly enough of the specimens under glass, and was by no means sorry when May suddenly exclaimed, 'Let's have a game of croquet!' to which her companion instantly assented, and went off to get the mallets and balls, telling Harry to look after the lady meanwhile. As soon as he was gone, the boy turned to his sister, and said earnestly, 'I wish you would tell me what it all means, May: I know you *are* May, you know, and it's no use pretending to be somebody else.'

This time the person addressed neither sat down nor cried as she had done before, but, turning her head towards him, made a face as if she didn't wish to be bothered, and replied, 'What is "it"? I don't know what *you* mean by "it," and why "it" should mean anything at all. Why can't you be quiet and nice, and not ask stupid questions. I'm a Fairy now, and it's absurd of you not to know it.' And then she

suddenly broke out into the good old song, which, by the way, she sang with especial sweetness :—

'Tell me where do Fairies dwell,
Where they weave each mystic spell ;
Tell me where their homes can be,
Where they sport in phantasy ?'

As she sang, the little brown gentleman suddenly re-appeared, laden with mallets and balls, which he immediately threw down upon the ground, and planting himself immediately opposite the lady, waited until she had quite done singing. Then, as if the passion for verse had suddenly seized upon him, he put his left hand behind him under his coat-tails, stretched out his right arm in the air, and began to deliver himself, in a somewhat theatrical fashion, of the following rhymes :—

'You ask me where the Fairies dwell,
Of whom you sing in tuneful strain,
And, though 'twere harder task to tell,
Those lips should never ask in vain.
They dwell not 'mid the haunts of men,
Or in the busy walks of life,
Where feeble mortals plot and plan
All in the same unholy strife :
Beneath one banner all enrolled—
Mammon their God—their Heaven, Gold !

'Ne'er to the crowded dance they steal,
Where whirl around a giddy train,
And in the mazy waltz may wheel
Alike the body and the brain :
Such scenes avoid with mournful eye
Our Fairies in their modesty.

'The lofty church and deep-toned bell,
And fragrant incense widely spread ;
The organ's all melodious swell,
And solemn chaunting o'er the dead :

Religion ruled by Priestly hand—
Such have no place in Fairyland.

'Where the blue Ocean swells in might,
And roll the waves with ceaseless roar,
And the white surge, in mad delight,
Breaks on the solitary shore;
No Fairy form the wave conveys,
There may we list no elfin lays.

'Still will you ask where Fairies dwell?
Dear Lady, I will strive to tell.
Oft have you seen, in childhood's hours,
When merrily you loved to roam
Amid the oak-encircled bowers
That waved in splendour round your home,
Near some moss-bank or crystal spring
The diamond-sparkling "Fairy Ring."

'Here is it that our Fairies dwell
(Though unperceived by mortal eye),
The peaceful spot could truly tell
Tales of their midnight revelry.
The grass still drooping, lately prest
By elfin feet in playful sport,
Shows how, when earthborn creatures rest,
Hither our Fairy bands resort,
And, on the moss and couches green,
Disport around our elfin queen!
I cannot ope to mortal eye
These scenes of sweet felicity;
I cannot in my verse express
One tithe of all their happiness.
It may not be—your fancy's eye
Alone may view their "phantasy";
Alone may know the modest dance
Of graceful Fairy elegance;
Alone may hear that lovely strain
The words re-echo back again.
For should you seek their dear retreat,
From mortal sound my elves would hide,

And at the the tread of mortal feet
Fly to their caverns terrified,
You may but guess that here they dwell,
And love them, though invisible!

'Yet am I wrong. Though far away
Our Fairies sport in woodland shade,
And mortal man were rash to stray
Within the spell-enchanted glade;
Still are their strains to mortals known,
In notes that make the heart rejoice;
And softer e'en than Fairy tone
I deem the tones of that sweet voice
Which doth to *all* enchantment bring
Whene'er my Maiden deigns to sing.'

Here the little brown gentleman came to a stop (as indeed it was time he should after such a preposterously long spell of verse), and bowed low before May, as if he had paid her the prettiest compliment in his power. But quite a different idea struck Harry.

'There!' he shouted, 'you see you *an't* a Fairy, May, not the least in the world. The old gentleman has plainly told you so, and called you a mortal to your face! What a humbug you are, pretending to be a Fairy when you are nothing of the sort! just like a girl!'

To his infinite surprise, the young lady took no notice whatever of this somewhat rude address, but made a polite bow to the little old gentleman, and merely remarked in a careless sort of tone, 'Don't you think we had better play croquet, now that you have brought the things?'

The other nodded his head, and they proceeded to the croquet ground, which was quite close by.

When they got there, the old gentleman proposed that they should play one against the other, with two balls each, but May declared that it would make a much better game if they played together, the two who belonged to the place, with one ball each, against Harry with two. Of course the lady had her own way, and the game began as she had wished it. But fancy Harry's horror and dismay when he found that the croquet balls were simply people's heads, cut off short so as to be round enough to run on the level ground, and perfectly alive all the time! In fact, they rather seemed to like it, and grinned and winked when they were struck one against the other. There was, however, a worse feature in the case. Every head bore the features of one of the Eton masters. Now to knock about a stranger's head would have been bad enough, but to be obliged to punch the head of a fellow who had it in his power to have you flogged for it, under some pretence or other, as soon as he got you safe back at Eton, was very far from being agreeable to Harry, who felt acutely the critical nature of his position.

There was one very *Young*-looking head, another very *Woolly*, another which had been light but was *Browning* by exposure to the air; one was as hard as *Stone*, one as white as *Snow*, and one with a *Warlike* appearance which made Harry quite afraid to strike it.

The worst of it was, too, that some of the heads were so exceedingly soft that Harry was quite sure he should hurt them, and the consequence was that he played very badly and was easily defeated by the other two. Naturally, therefore, he soon got tired of

the game, and was much rejoiced when May threw down her mallet and exclaimed, 'How hot this makes one! Let us leave off now, and have five o'clock tea!'

As nobody raised any objection to this proposal, they all left the croquet ground and went back to the house, which they entered by the drawing-room window, and the little brown gentleman rang the bell forthwith. Presently afterwards a scuffling noise was heard, and in another moment the door opened, and, to Harry's great astonishment, in walked a squirrel. He was dressed in green livery, trimmed with white, fitting close to his skin and very neatly made, and his head was powdered like that of a regular footman in those establishments in which that practice is still continued. But, for all that, he was nothing more nor less than a squirrel, as was abundantly proved by his head, ears, and restless little eyes, to say nothing of his bushy tail, which he carried with great dignity as he entered the room on his hind legs.

'Bring tea under the arbutus!' said the little old gentleman; upon which the other bowed and withdrew. The party then again went into the shubbery, and sat down under a beautiful arbutus which spread its shade around in an agreeable manner, and under which were several garden chairs conveniently placed. In a few minutes the squirrel, with three others of his kind similarly dressed, came hurrying out of the house with the tea which had been ordered. They carried with them a table of circular form, and of size sufficient to contain a silver tray which they placed upon it, and established it opposite the young lady. Upon the tray were a small silver tea-pot, and three cups and saucers,

the same number of plates, a cake and several slices of thin bread and butter, and a small silver cream-jug of ancient and fantastic pattern. There was nothing remarkable in all this apparatus, which was in fact very similar to that which was employed every day at home for his sister's five o'clock tea. But as soon as it had been set before May, the table began to turn slowly round and round, as if it was not quite satisfied with its position, and wanted to alter it.

Harry had heard a good deal about table-turning, but it struck him that the practice was an exceedingly inconvenient one when adopted by tables which had your meals upon them. May and her companion, however, did not seem to think there was anything extraordinary in the matter. The former, in no way puzzled or surprised, cleverly lifted the tea-pot as it moved past her, and dexterously poured out three cups of tea without spilling a drop. Then she asked Harry to cut her some cake, which he found the greatest difficulty in doing, as the table resolutely refused to stop, and kept on going steadily round. However, as an Eton boy never gives way to any difficulties, Harry managed, somehow or other, to chop a bit out of the cake as it passed him, which he handed to his sister. He was not so fortunate with the cream, which he could not pour into his cup without spilling, and was much irritated at seeing the squirrels, who were all standing in a row behind May's chair, evidently laughing to themselves at his awkwardness.

'I don't see why your servants should laugh,' said he rather crossly. 'It is an absurd thing to have such a table like this for your five o'clock tea. It would be

all very well if one happened to be a juggler or conjuror, or anything of that kind, but I don't see any fun in it as it is.'

'Fun in it?' said the little brown gentleman at once. 'No, of course not, but you see tea on it, which is much better. Who ever saw fun in a tea-table?'

'You know what I mean, quite well,' replied Harry, by no means improved in temper by this rejoinder. 'And I don't see why you should turn everything a fellow says into a joke. I say it is stupid to have a table which never stands still—I know I wouldn't have one in my room at Eton if I knew it.'

'Probably not,' remarked the old gentleman in a grave tone. 'Probably not. But then we know that everything is exactly as it should be at Eton. There is a wisdom and consistency in the arrangement of that ancient school which we in Fairyland immensely admire, but which we cannot hope to equal.'

'Well,' cried Harry, naturally pleased to hear praise of the place of which all Etonians are so proud, 'I'm glad you stick up for the old school, at all events!'

'Who would not do so?' replied his friend. 'Fairies, who love absurdities of all kinds, could hardly help giving their approval to that excellent place of education.'

'Absurdities!' exclaimed the boy. 'I don't understand what you mean.'

'Oh dear no! not at all!' observed the old gentleman sarcastically. 'There is nothing absurd about Eton ways and Eton ideas at all. It isn't the least absurd, for instance, to make it essential to a boy's

education that he should come up to a certain standard in mathematics, which not five boys in a hundred ever need or do look at again in after life, and to make a knowledge of French and German a secondary and minor consideration, which would be of material advantage, probably, to ninety-five boys out of the same number. It isn't the least absurd, either, (though it isn't Eton's fault, poor thing) to take pains to get a good Head Master, and then, instead of leaving him to command, as the colonel of a regiment does, those over whom he is placed, to put over him a Governing Body who know nothing at all, except theoretically, about education or the management of boys, and whose only chance of being useful is never to interfere at all. And your own peculiar Eton ways are not absurd at all, either. Oh no! You don't call it "six o'clock lesson" when you go into school at seven; when your "presence" is necessary to answer to your names in the school-yard, you don't call it "absence;" and when you are ill, and have to stay *in*, you never term it "staying *out!*" Oh no! there's nothing absurd about Eton at all!'

These words, and the tone of the old gentleman, not unnaturally irritated Harry considerably, and he began to prepare to answer in an angry manner. He felt bound to make a gallant defence of the Governing Body (so dear to those Etonians who think their school has been improved by its constitution), to vindicate the necessity of mathematics (so beloved by all boys, and the comfort and solace in after life of everyone who, whatever his natural taste may be, has been forced to study them), and to explain the school phrases,

which the old gentleman had so palpably misunderstood and misrepresented. Before, however, he could say a word, May gave a tremendous yawn, which, under all the circumstances of the case, was not remarkable.

'Dear me!' she said, 'what nonsense you two are talking about! *Do* choose some more amusing subject.'

Harry instantly stopped, for he felt that May was quite right, and that it was hardly fair upon her to discuss matters about which she knew nothing, and probably cared less. So by way of changing the conversation he remarked, 'What an odd fancy it is to have squirrels for servants! Don't they wear out their livery, climbing about in the trees?'

'Dear me!' said the old gentleman, 'how *very* foolish you are, if you will excuse me for saying so. Fairy livery doesn't tear so easily, and squirrels are first-rate servants: clean, active, sharp, and capital fellows to get up early in the morning, which is more than can be said for some servants. But now you mention them, we will have tea taken away.' So saying, he made a sign to the attendant squirrels, who instantly ran forward, and with graceful alacrity removed the table and tea-things.

'Now,' said May, 'somebody tell me a story, please.'

Harry looked at the little brown gentleman, and the little brown gentleman looked at Harry, but neither of them seemed inclined to begin. Then the other nudged Harry and whispered in his ear, but so loud that May could hear quite easily, 'You begin.

She knows all my stories, and she's frightfully particular about not having the same stories told over again.'

Harry was quite ready to oblige; so he coughed and cleared his throat, as people do when they are going to sing, or tell a story, or anything for which they wish the company to be silent and give their attention. Then he began—'Once upon a time——'

'Stop!' said May. 'I want to know why people always begin their stories like that. "Once upon a time." What does it mean? Why *once*—more than *twice*—why not twice under an eternity instead of once upon a time—I don't see the reason for it at all. Don't begin so.'

Harry cleared his throat again and said, 'In days now long gone by——'

'Stop!' cried May again. '*That* isn't the least bit better than the other. Why "in" days more than "out of" days? Why only "days," either? what have the poor nights done to be left out, and why "*now*" long ago, it was "*then*" long ago, wasn't it?'

At this second interruption Harry was rather annoyed. 'Really,' said he, 'one cannot tell a story if one is to be interrupted every moment.'

'Nonsense!' replied May; 'it's your own fault. Begin properly, can't you?'

So Harry, determined not to take offence where none was intended to be given, began once more. 'A king lived in a far country——'

'*Please* don't be so silly,' again interrupted his sister. 'Of course he lived, we know that—but why a far country more than a near country? if it was far from some places it was near to others, wasn't it?

HARRY'S DREAM.

And why a king? other people lived there, I suppose, as well as him. I have no patience with kings who live alone. Tell us something better than *that!*'

'I shall tell you nothing at all,' replied Harry, 'if you keep on interrupting so: it's no use trying to tell *you* a story. Let the old gentleman try!'

'*I* tell a story!' shouted that individual loudly. 'Never did such a thing in my life. *I* always tell the truth.'

'How tiresome you are!' said Harry; 'you know perfectly well that we are not talking about *that* kind of story—but a real history of something that happened to somebody at some time or other.'

'Oh! my dear!' interposed May, 'I am sure you have put a great many too many "somes" and "somebodies" into that sentence. Speak properly or not at all.'

'To speak a proper-lie *would* be to tell a story,' gravely interposed the little brown gentleman.

'No punning allowed!' cried May, and instantly jumping up, gave the speaker a tremendous box on the ears. To Harry's utter astonishment, off came the old gentleman's head with the blow, and began rolling away as hard as it could over the lawn, preserving the most imperturbable gravity upon its countenance all the while, and avoiding the flower-beds with the greatest dexterity. His body at first remained immovable, but presently took its seat in one of the chairs as gravely as if nothing unusual had occurred, and stretching out one of its hands, recovered the brown wide-awake, which had dropped upon the ground from the effects of the blow, and calmly

placed it upon the table. Harry, however, was still more amazed when he saw that May, instead of showing the smallest signs of sorrow for what she had done, or pity for the sufferer, instantly darted forward in pursuit of the head, kicking at it repeatedly with great violence, just for all the world as if it had been a foot-ball; the head, however, eluded her kicks continually, winking at Harry all the time in a knowing manner as he did so, until at last May got so vexed at her want of success that she suddenly stopped and cried out in a loud voice, 'It isn't fair—no one can catch a dodging idiot of a head like that, and I won't try any more. I say, *Harry!*'

The words rang through his ears like the blast of a trumpet, and—Harry awoke! Yes. He awoke, and there he was seated on the mossy bank where he had sat down to rest, the woodland sounds still about him, the woodland beauties all around, and not least among them, his own dear sister May standing close to him and laughing merrily.

'Harry, dear!' she said, 'how sound asleep you were! I have been gathering flowers all round you for this ten minutes without your ever hearing me, and I shouldnit have woke you now, only the dressing bell has rung ever so long, and we shall be late for dinner if we don't go home directly.'

Harry sat up and rubbed his eyes as if he meant to bring them out of his head, then he looked at May in a confused, dreamy kind of way.

'But where's the little brown gentleman's head?' he asked.

'On his shoulders, I suppose,' replied his sister,

laughing; 'I have seen no little brown gentleman except the rabbits, of whom there are plenty about.'

Harry could not quite understand it yet. As to having been asleep, he might perhaps have dozed a little, but what he had seen and heard had been too real and vivid not to be true. Besides, there, straight before his eyes, was the very identical branch from which the little brown gentleman had been dangling when he first saw him, and he felt quite convinced that he could not be far off at that moment. However, when he questioned May again, and found that she only laughed at the whole thing, and told him he had certainly had a most amusing dream, it was evident that it was useless to expect from her any further information upon the subject. The only thing to be done, in fact, was to go home with her and dress for dinner, which accordingly he did.

The brother and sister walked through the beautiful old wood together, laughing and talking to each other, in the full enjoyment of one of the sweetest ties of kindred affection which Heaven has given to mortals. Remember, you brothers, who chance to read this little story, that a sister's love is among the greatest blessings which your boyhood will ever have, and happy are you if you know how to value and appreciate that blessing. Remember too, sisters, that you will not find many friends in life so firm and true and faithful as a brother. Remember, both brothers and sisters, that according as you value and cherish this tie of relationship in early life, so will the memories of your youth at home be happy or the reverse. Harry and May loved nothing

better than to be together, and right happy were the Eton holidays which they spent in the old home at Northwell Park. On this afternoon they rambled homewards through the old wood and across the park, and as they did so, they talked of many things and people, but their thoughts principally ran upon the strange dream—if dream it was—that had come to Harry under the shade of the old beech. I cannot tell you more about it now than that Harry would never, from that day to this, allow that it *was* a dream. Perhaps he had other visions afterwards which confirmed him in this idea. Perhaps he had more visits of a friendly character from the little brown gentleman. If so, I hope I shall hear of some of them and be able to tell them to you at some future time.

When the sun is hot, and the green leaves of the neighbouring woods tempt me to wander beneath their friendly shade, I, too, like Harry, like to rest upon mossy banks and listen to all the soothing sounds of woodland life. Then it is that tiny feet come tripping around me, tiny voices whisper in mine ears, and the wondrous legends of Fairyland are told me by those who alone have the right to tell them; they come to me so kindly and they speak so softly and sweetly, and their loveliness of face and figure is like—— But, Hush! I must not say anything else about them, or they will be angry and come no more. So I will not say another word upon the subject, and will only promise that if Harry has another visit from his friend, and tells me about it, I will not keep the knowledge to myself, but will as soon as possible take steps to let my friends know as

much of the matter as I do. I know that the dream (if dream it was, which I very much doubt) did Harry a great deal of good. True it is, he could never look at old Watkins without laughing at the idea of his head being stuck as an annual in the little brown gentleman's flower-beds; but at the same time he never 'confounded,' the worthy man again, and whilst unable invariably to respect him as an umpire, always gave him credit for good intentions, and forbore to question his decisions even when they resulted so unpleasantly to himself as on the occasion of the Prye and Northwell match. And this is all I can at present tell you about the meeting between Harry Sanderson and the Little Brown Gentleman.

VI.

THE RED BARON.

THERE was once a young man who, having a good house of his own, lots of money, and, plenty of friends, became, as a natural consequence, exceedingly discontented with himself and everybody about him. Having nothing to do but to amuse himself, it followed as a matter of course that nothing amused him. Everything about him seemed dull and stupid, and the pleasures of other people were to him wearisome beyond measure. Riding was insipid—shooting bored him—cricket was too much exertion—and as for croquet, he positively detested its very name. Under these circumstances, life became a burden to him, and he frequently remarked that there was nothing worth living for in the world. This feeling took such strong hold upon his mind that it was very doubtful whether he would not have taken measures to get rid of that which he found himself so utterly unable to enjoy, had not an occurrence taken place which turned his thoughts into an entirely novel and different channel. He casually encountered a great traveller, who had visited every quarter of the globe and was full of anecdotes of things and people of whom our hero had scarcely ever heard. He listened with attention to

this gentleman's stories, some of which were of a very interesting and exciting character, and became at last fired with an earnest desire to travel and see for himself all the wonderful things of which he heard. There was little difficulty about his doing so, inasmuch as he had no person to control and no business to hinder him, and it soon became evident to his friends that he had quite made up his own mind upon the subject. He was perfectly resolved to travel in search of adventures; and as no one had any interest in attempting to dissuade him from the undertaking, he found it easy to make his arrangements, and was prepared to start almost before he had made up his mind where to go to. Upon one point, however, he was firmly resolved, namely, that he would travel alone, without servant or equipage, being of opinion that in this manner he should enjoy himself more, and should be more likely to encounter the adventures which he desired. Accordingly, having packed such things as he considered absolutely essential into a knapsack, he slung the latter across his shoulders, and set out upon his journey with courage in his heart, a stout oaken staff in his hand, and a green 'wideawake' on his head.

For many miles our traveller pursued his way without the occurrence of any incident worthy of notice: sometimes the weather was bright and fine, which had a palpable effect upon his spirits, and caused him to step forward upon his journey with light and elastic steps; sometimes it rained, which generally had the effect of damping his ardour as well as his clothes, and suggesting the idea that he had much better have

stayed at home. However, having once undertaken the expedition he determined to persevere, and so kept on walking from day to day until he reached a part of the world to which he was an entire stranger, and about sunset upon a fine December afternoon entered a large straggling village which seemed to promise rest and shelter for the night.

As he felt rather in want of both, our hero strode cheerfully along that which appeared to be the village street, looking right and left for some inn at which his wants might be supplied. For some time, however, he could see nothing of the kind, nor did he encounter a human being of any sort, size, or description from whom he might obtain information as to the nearest and best place of entertainment. This struck him as rather strange, but at first he set it down as being probably the fashion of the country for people not to stay out after a certain hour, and as it was already drawing towards evening, so far from blaming those who had sought the shelter of their roofs, he felt all the more inclined to follow their example. Having, however, unfortunately no roof at hand to shelter him, he was rather disconcerted at the apparent absence of population, and still more so when, having knocked at the doors of several of the houses, he received no answer whatever. This, however, might proceed either from the absence of the inhabitants, who, as he judged from the vast forests near at hand, were probably wood-cutters, who camped out at night when working at a distance from home, or from their being assembled together at some place of entertainment in the neighbourhood.

None such, however, could he find, and the situation was beginning to be uncomfortable, when upon his rapping hard at the door of a small cottage, an old woman put her head out of the window close by, and asked what he wanted. As she spoke a language which he could by no means understand, he had some difficulty in explaining that he desired food and a night's lodging. When at last she comprehended his meaning, she shook her head vehemently as regarded his latter request, but presently thrust her hand out of the window with a moderate-sized, black-looking loaf of bread which looked anything but inviting, but which our friend was fain to accept under the circumstances in which he found himself. Still, bread was not shelter, and he began to wonder where he should have to pass the night.

Suddenly, however, as he moved along the road, and had almost passed the village, he saw two large gates at the entrance of what seemed to be an old avenue immediately upon the right hand. The gates were very old, and one of them stood partly open, so that he had no difficulty in entering. Having done so, he argued to himself that as most avenues led to houses, it was probable that this one formed no exception to the general rule. So he marched boldly up the avenue for at least half a mile, and then found himself immediately opposite a large castle. There was a moat around it, across which was an ancient drawbridge, on to which opened two large gates whose antiquity prevented their forming any impediment to his advance, especially as they stood wide open as if to invite him to enter. He did so, and walked into a

small court-yard, which was completely overgrown with grass, and looked as if neither the foot nor the scythe of man had been there for years. Immediately opposite him were doors, which, following the custom of the place, were also ajar, and which opened into a small stone-paved entrance hall, from which a passage led straight forward into a large corridor.

The traveller paused for a moment to listen, but hearing nothing, determined that his only course was to seek for himself the lodging which he wanted, and accordingly walked forward along the passage and stood at the end deliberating whether to turn to the right or left, as he appeared to be standing in about the centre of the corridor. As it was quite chance which was the best way, he eventually chose the right. Accordingly he marched up the empty corridor, which resounded with the noise of his footsteps, and the old pictures which hung on its walls on either side appeared to frown down upon him as if he was an intruder, which, in fact, he decidedly was. Presently he came to a door on each side, and after a moment's hesitation, again chose that on the right. It led into a long apartment, which, at some time or other, must have served for a dining-room or banqueting-hall in which the former owner of the castle had feasted his friends and vassals when inclined to be generous. Our friend paused on the threshold of the door, and meditated on various subjects suggested by the place.

'Here,' he thought, 'has often sat the Baron to whom this castle belonged in old days, if Baron he was —and as most owners of castles in this part of the world are Barons, unless they happen to be grand Dukes

or Princes, I am probably not wrong in attributing to him this title. Here, then, the old Baron has often sat at the head of his table, drinking huge draughts of red wine, or strong ale, and watching with paternal gratification the revelry of his retainers. Perhaps some poor wretches, taken prisoners in a raid against a neighbouring village, have been bound to these great pillars which seem to support the roof, and compelled to watch the jovial proceedings of their captors, trembling all the while with fear as to what their own fate would be. Perhaps the castle has, at some time or other, been stormed, and within this very hall the brave old Baron has made a gallant stand to defend the home of his forefathers against an invading force. Perhaps——' but at this point he suddenly recollected that these romantic fancies would by no means satisfy the cravings of hunger which beset him, and that he might as well postpone them until he had partaken of food and arranged his quarters for the night.

He strode forward, therefore, into the hall, and proceeding to the farther end, found that the ancient fireplace and chimney were of such an enormous size that it would take him a great deal more of time and trouble to light a fire there than would be the case if he could discover some smaller and more convenient chamber. Accordingly, he left the hall by the same door as that by which he had entered, principally because he saw no other, and opening that immediately opposite, perceived a noble old oak staircase before him, which he proceeded to ascend without delay. The stairs creaked under him as he advanced, they had evidently been unused to be mounted for some

time, and showed their resentment in this manner, being the only way which stairs have of expressing their feelings. At the top he paused, and found himself in a good-sized lobby, from which passages ran right and left, and immediately in front of him were three doors. Remembering the old Latin proverb, that the middle is the safest place, he tried the handle of the middle door, and entered a room which had evidently been a bed-room, and, for the matter of that, was one still. An ancient bedstead occupied one corner, a still more ancient wardrobe filled another, a rickety old table stood opposite the fireplace, while several chairs, in a state of worm-eaten dilapidation, constituted the only other furniture of the apartment. It was altogether rather a comfortless place to look at, but at all events it was a better spot to sleep in than the open air, and the traveller had no doubt that matters would mend if he could only light a fire and eat the supper for which he was beginning to be more than anxious.

The fire did not seem to have been lighted in that room for some time past, but that was no reason why the fireplace should not be put to its proper use; and as the old chairs appeared to be fit for little else than fuel, for which they would serve most admirably, the traveller determined to lose no time in setting about the matter, and endeavouring to make himself as comfortable as the circumstances of the case would permit. There was an old stump of a poker of which he could make use, and some of the faded hangings of the bed would admirably supply the place of paper. He accordingly tore some off without difficulty, placed it in the grate, then proceeded deliberately to break up one

THE RED BARON.

of the old chairs, and carefully laid a fire, placing on the top of the smaller bits of wood the large arm of a venerable arm-chair which he thought would be sure to smoulder on and last some way into the night. Then, having previously placed his food upon the old table, he drew the latter as near the fireplace as he could, and, taking from his pocket a box of matches which he always carried about him, struck a light, and applied it to the bed-hangings in the grate. They caught at once, and it seemed for a moment as if he would very quickly have a blazing fire. But the wood of the chairs seemed doubtful about catching light as soon as our traveller could wish, and therefore he knelt down before the fireplace, stooped forward, and lowering his head to the proper level, began to blow softly at first and then more vigorously, in order to kindle the flame which appeared to require this encouragement.

As he was thus employed, all of a sudden he received a violent kick upon a part of his body which in the stooping position that he had assumed was naturally exposed to the attack of an enemy, and so totally unexpected was the assault that he very nearly fell forward against the bars of the grate. Enraged beyond measure, and astonished even more than he was enraged, at this extraordinary attack, at such a time and in such a place, the traveller jumped up and faced round in the greatest indignation.

At a short distance from him stood a little Red man: indisputably and decidedly a little Red man, for everything he had on was of that colour, even to the conical-shaped hat upon his head, like the paper

foolscaps which children make for each other, and the boots upon his feet, the toes of which turned up after the fashion of a Chinaman's shoes. Red he was in dress, and as nearly red as possible in the colour of his face, but whether that arose from natural causes or from temporary irritation it was impossible to say off-hand. He was choking with suppressed passion. His red eyebrows frowned over his curious ruby eyes, his red whiskers stood out as if each hair was in a rage, separately, by itself, and his nose and cheeks shone like the shell of a lobster as the light from the now kindled fire fell upon them. He could scarcely have been four feet high, and there was nothing very powerful in his make, nor did he carry arms which might have made him appear more formidable than his appearance would have otherwise led you to suppose. But, formidable or not, there he stood, speechless and bursting with rage, and the sight was really so ludicrous that the traveller would scarcely have been able to restrain himself from an immoderate fit of laughter if it had not been that he still felt the force with which the toe of the little Red man had been fundamentally applied to himself. Assuming therefore, an angry tone, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered from his surprise, he thus addressed the new comer:—

'How dare you behave in this manner, sir? Is this the way you treat strangers in your country? What do you mean by this cowardly assault?'

The eyes of the little Red man glared fearfully as the traveller spoke these words, and as soon as they were finished, he jumped at least half his own height in the air with fury, and then replied as follows:—

'Assault? you may call it a salt, or a pepper and a mustard into the bargain, if you please. How dare *you* come into a fellow's house and break up his chairs like this without asking leave? Why, here have I lived two hundred and fifty years in this place, and never a man before has had the audacity to do what you are doing. Paint me green if I stand it!' and he jumped up again in his fury, coming down in dangerous proximity to the traveller's toes.

'Paint you green!' said the latter, 'with all my heart, so that I could make you the "Green Man and *still*," for if you jump about in this way you'll presently do mischief. But allow me respectfully to observe that if you have really occupied this castle so long, its condition reflects no little discredit upon you, whether you be owner or tenant. It is evident that carpenters and bricklayers have not been inside the house for many a long year; it wants painting dreadfully, and its general state of repair, or rather of non-repair, is absolutely disgraceful to all concerned.'

'What's that to you, man?' angrily asked the other. 'The castle is not yours and never will be—why can't you leave it to take care of itself?'

'Because,' calmly replied the young man, 'there appears to be no inn in the village, and nowhere else for a traveller to obtain a night's lodging; and this being the case, I could do nothing else except come here.'

'But,' remarked the little red man, looking the other steadily in the face, and somewhat calming down from his previous state of fury, 'didn't they tell you the castle was haunted?'

'Perhaps they did and perhaps they didn't,' said

the traveller; 'but really one cannot be turned away from the only available shelter by such trifles as *that*. Ghosts and such things are all very well in their way, and may do a great deal of harm to people who choose to be afraid of them. But there is something much worse than any ghost that ever yet made a fool of himself by coming when he wasn't wanted, and that something is a bad cold, which I should certainly have caught if I had passed this December night in the open air. Bad colds, too, not unfrequently produce rheumatic fevers; so, all things considered, I think I have done what any sensible fellow would have done in coming here.'

'Ain't you afraid, then?' asked the little red man. 'Look at me and tremble!' and so saying he began to make the most hideous grimaces you can imagine, puffing out his cheeks, glaring with his eyes, and twisting his limbs into the most curious and unnatural contortions.

'Afraid?' said the traveller in a tone of surprise. 'What is there to be afraid of in a little chap like you who comes in and gives one a kick when one isn't looking? I wonder you ain't afraid yourself of the probable consequences of such a cowardly attack upon a fellow so much bigger than yourself; and as to trembling, I don't myself see what there is to tremble at in a little muff that comes and twists his face into an uglier grimace than that which nature has fixed upon it. Goodness knows you're frightful enough without making yourself any worse!'

At these words the little red man waxed more furious than ever.

'But you *must* be frightened!' he screamed out, 'you *shall* be frightened! All the people about here are frightened at me, if I ever deign to show myself to them!'

'More fools they,' responded the traveller, and then added in a meditative tone, 'I have always thought that ghosts were only terrible on account of the folly of mortals which makes them so. There *can* be nothing terrible in them really, if people would only treat them in an ordinary manner.'

'You *shall* be frightened, though,' said the little red man in a threatening tone, 'before you leave this castle!'

'Very likely,' remarked the traveller with imperturbable calmness. 'I never said I shouldn't. However, now that my fire has burnt up, allow me, thanking you kindly for your chairs, if indeed they *are* yours, to sit down to my supper. I would ask you to join me, in spite of your rudeness, only unfortunately I haven't got enough here for two.'

'Well!' exclaimed the other in a tone of surprise, 'I *will* say you are the coolest hand I have seen for many a long day. I say! I know where there is some wonderful old madeira in this castle. If I fetch a bottle, shall we share it?'

'Oh you old rascal!' said the traveller, who by this time had drawn up the best of the remaining chairs to the table, and, seating himself thereupon, had begun to make preparations for his meal. 'Oh you old scamp! You are up to your tricks, I know! You would doctor the bottle, and I should find myself bewitched, or changed into a ghost myself, or something uncomfortable before morning.'

'No!' cried the little red man. 'Upon the honour

of a ghost and a gentleman I mean fair. And what's more, that black-looking loaf of bread and musty old cheese looks but poor fare for a fellow like you. I will give you something better. To say the truth, I like your pluck: you are the first fellow I have seen here who has not been frightened out of his wits at me or my friends, for there are quite a company of us here. You shall be rewarded for your courage. I don't mean to say I am going to show you buried treasure or to tell you something wonderful which will happen if you do some feat which you would probably much rather not have to do, and which would be no real good to anybody if you *did*. But this I can and will promise you. I will bring you up a supper which you shall find good enough to please you; I will share that supper with you; and you shall go forward on your journey to-morrow in no respect the worse for your night passed in the Haunted Castle. All I will ask of you is to promise not to go and tell a lot of other fellows what has happened to you here, because it might be unpleasant.'

'That I will readily promise,' said the traveller; 'and as I really think you seem a respectable kind of ghost, who would not seek to take a mean advantage of a fellow, I will take you at your word and trust to you for the supper.'

'Done along with you!' cried the little red man at this: 'Wait here a bit, and keep up the fire. I will be back again in the twinkling of an eyelid.'

So saying, he left the room, and the traveller proceeded to break up another chair so as to keep the fire going, and then drawing the next best one he could find up to the table, placed it on the other side,

and awaited the return of the strange individual with whom he had just made acquaintance. True to his word, the latter was gone but a very few minutes, and when he re-entered the room, it was with a tray which he carefully deposited upon the table before he took his seat. Upon the tray was a gigantic pasty of appetising appearance to the hungry traveller, and, more than the pasty, there was an addition to the supper which made his eyes gleam with pleasure. Not one, but four bottles of the old madeira stood side by side together, the cobwebs still clinging to them with affectionate tenacity, and their appearance giving every promise of internal goodness.

'You're a regular brick, I declare!' cried the traveller as the little red man arranged the tray comfortably upon the table.

'Ah!' replied the other, 'that is just what my poor old friend Smith (he was from England, too, as I see you are) used to say—let me see—just two hundred and thirteen years ago come next Lady-day, when he died.'

'What sort of a chap was *he* when he was at home?' asked the traveller carelessly, as he watched his companion, who had now taken up a large silver-handled knife and a fork of similar description, and was proceeding to cut a large slice out of the dish before him.

'I don't know what he may have been at home,' said he, 'but he was a right good fellow out here, and would have married my daughter—only he didn't.'

'Why not?' demanded the other.

'Ah!' said the little red man, 'that's a long story, and perhaps you wouldn't care to hear it. Have some pasty?'

'I should think so! Just a little!' laughed the traveller. 'Never was so hungry in my life! But I should like to hear that story all the same. By Jove! this is a Venison Pasty, and first-rate too!'

'Glad to hear it, I'm sure,' observed his host. 'You shall hear the story after supper, if you really care to do so. Meanwhile let's have a glass of madeira together. Got a corkscrew?'

'To be 'sure I have,' returned the traveller. 'Never travel without such things.' So saying, he pulled out a large clasp knife, part of which formed a strong corkscrew, and with this he carefully extracted the cork of one of the bottles near him, and with much caution wiped the mouth of the bottle with a clean pocket-handkerchief. Then he filled two large wine glasses which his host had brought upon the tray, for ghosts do not, any more than mortals, like to drink out of the bottle if they can help it.

The two looked at each other; bowed; took a long sip at the wine, and then by a simultaneous and knowing wink of the eye, bore testimony to its excellence. *So* excellent indeed was it, that they very soon filled their glasses again. Their attacks upon the pasty, meantime, were frequent, and sustained with so much vigour that the mighty fabric began to melt away and disappear before the joint appetites which it had to satisfy. At last both laid down their knives and forks, and mutually acknowledged that they could do no more that night in the way of eating. Then they drew their chairs one on each side of the fireplace, replenished the fire once more, uncorked such of the madeira bottles as had not yet undergone that

process, and arranged themselves as cosily and comfortably as if they had been man and wife, or two college companions, or two gentlemen tired of a good day's hunting, instead of a weary traveller in a haunted castle and the identical ghost who had given that castle its reputation.

After a few minutes devoted to reflection and digestion, the latter of which was necessary to the traveller, if not to his companion, the latter gravely enquired whether his new friend objected to smoke, and an answer in the negative having been returned, drew from his pocket a pipe, coloured red like everything else belonging to him, which he presently lighted, and began to puff away with great assiduity. Our friend, nothing loth to follow so excellent an example, produced his own pipe and set to work to enjoy himself after the same fashion. For some few moments they smoked in silence, until the traveller, who was always for making the most of opportunities which threw themselves in his way when on a journey, bethought him of what had fallen from his companion at the commencement of their supper, and asked him whether he felt inclined to relate to him the story to which he had alluded. With a deep sigh, as if the request had evoked painful memories, the little red man said that he would not refuse.

'Still,' remarked he, 'I would have you know that the story is one which I would only tell to a boon companion like yourself. You eat with an appetite worthy of a peasant—you drink with a relish worthy of a prince—you smoke also like one who knows how to enjoy it, and not like those numerous

fools who do it because they think it fine or fashionable, without the least enjoyment in the world. Altogether, I hold you to be a capital fellow, and henceforward I shall always entertain for you feelings of esteem—I may even say regard. This being the case, I shall not refuse to tell you the story of my life, or rather of that part of it which relates to your compatriot Smith. I know you will forgive me if I should become affected during the recital. The story relates to events which happened long ago, but which will never be effaced from my memory as long as I am a ghost.' So saying, the little red man once more sighed deeply, and then, after a long pull at his pipe and one more glass of madeira, began as follows:—

'Some two hundred and twenty years ago, I was the baron who owned this castle and a fair domain to boot—though why one should say "to boot" rather than "to shoe" or "to stocking" is a thing which has always puzzled me considerably. I was in the prime of life, strong, hearty, as wealthy as need be, and pretty well feared, if not respected, in the neighbourhood. I say I was not respected, and in fact it was hardly possible to respect me, for a more desperate scamp than I was could hardly be found anywhere in the country. I lived a bad life. I drank hard, I swore hard, I lived hard altogether, and none of the neighbours cared to cross my path if they could possibly avoid it. I had been engaged in constant feuds with my brother-barons ever since I came to the property, and by force or cunning had got the better of all of them with whom I had come to open rupture. Some there were who fawned upon and flat-

tered me, and with them I kept on good terms, though they had, so to say, to eat dirt in order to avoid falling out with me, for I brooked no interference and no contradiction whatever, and did what I pleased when I pleased and where I pleased always, which was my idea of enjoying life as a Baron *should* enjoy it.'

'Why, what an old rascal you must have been!' here interrupted the traveller.

The little red man frowned. 'If you interrupt,' he said, 'I shall shut up directly. I have already told you what a bad fellow I was, and I don't think it very civil of you to recall attention to the fact.'

'Upon my word, I beg your pardon,' said the traveller. 'It *was* very thoughtless of me, and quite unnecessary.'

'Don't do it again, then!' observed the other severely; and then, taking another whiff of his pipe and another glass of madeira, continued his narrative.

'My fame in battle had become considerable, and not only my fame in battle, but my reputation for cruelty had also spread abroad near and far. To tell you the truth, I was naturally of a merciful disposition. I could not bear the idea of immuring poor creatures in the dungeons of my castle (which are exceedingly damp and unpleasant even at the present day), or of subjecting them to torture in order to extract ransom from their friends. These things were done, I knew, by other barons, but for my part I always thought it best to kill people outright rather than resort to such expedients. Besides, I hated to be troubled with prisoners, and altogether I made up

my mind when I first began my life of warfare that the most desirable plan really was to take everything you could get from the people you conquered, and then to put them out of their misery as soon as possible. The world, however, taking a different view of the matter, called my proceedings cruel, and in consequence of them gave me the distinguishing title of the Red Baron, because of the blood which I was, with some reason, supposed to have shed. I may mention to you, in passing, that this name, which has stuck to me in the spirit world, has been the cause of my being obliged to wear always garments of the colour which you have doubtless remarked, and of which I confess I sometimes get uncommonly tired.

'Well, the name of the Red Baron, now almost forgotten, save in legends of the timid peasants, was well enough known in my lifetime. Now, indeed, I wish heartily enough that it had been known for good instead of evil deeds. But it is too late to talk of that. My home life was not so happy as it might have been. I married the daughter of a neighbouring baron, who was partly engaged to somebody else. That was the chief reason why I wished to marry her. She was beautiful, certainly, but so were many others, and I did not particularly care for her. But she had slighted me once, or I fancied she had, which came to the same thing with me in those days. Moreover, I knew she loved the other fellow, and he was fond of her—devoted, I may say. I hated *him*, so I resolved to marry her, which I was able to accomplish through the hold I had upon her old fool of a father, who was rather richer than his neighbours

(an additional reason for me to marry his daughter), and dreadfully afraid that if he refused me anything, I should come and take it. He wasn't far wrong, either, for when I had made up my mind to marry his daughter, marry her I would, if I had had to carry her off from her father's castle. It didn't come to *that* though! The old fellow pretended to be overjoyed at my proposal—the girl made some show of resistance at first, and appealed to my better feelings, forsooth, saying that she loved another. *That* I knew before, but to make matters more certain I had the favoured lover dealt with after a summary fashion. He was found dead at the foot of a high cliff one fine morning, having got there from the top in a manner incompatible with the preservation of life. Then matters went more smoothly. Adeline resisted no longer. She behaved like a lamb, obeyed her father without demur, and became the bride of the Red Baron.

'I wish I could say that I can look back upon my married life with any feelings of satisfaction. She was too good for me, Poor Adeline! hers was a sad existence. I don't think she ever quite got over the loss of that fellow, for she had really loved him. However, she did her duty by me, only she irritated me beyond measure by trying to persuade me to give up some of what she called my wicked ways. Her advice and tears had not, I regret to say, the slightest effect upon me, and I went on just the same. We had three children: Rudolf, Frederick, and Christina. They were little things still when their mother died. That was through me, too. I don't mean to say I ever

struck her or was cruel to her save by neglect and by words. Not so bad as that was I, though bad enough in every other way. But one evening when I had had my fill of liquor, and was going on in my old ways, and boasting of some cruel exploit or other, my wife expostulated and advised until she drove me nearly wild. In a moment of bitter folly I taunted her about the lover of her youth, and let her know that his death was no accident. Never will her look of horror be effaced from my memory. She started back from me with disgust. With all my faults, she had never deemed me capable of wilful, deliberate assassination. In her pure soul she could not have imagined such a depth of wickedness to be possible. It broke her heart. She never held up her head again, and left me with those three children in this old castle, a lonely widower, with my good angel taken from me for ever.

'I never married again. I never cared much for any of the other sex, save and except for that daughter of whom I spoke to you at first. Christina was the apple of my eye. My pet, my darling, my own beautiful child—I can scarcely speak of you now.' At this point the little red man paused, lit his pipe, which had gone out, gave a whiff or two, replenished and emptied another glass of madeira, heaved one more sigh, and then continued his story, in which the traveller had become so much interested that he took very good care not to interrupt.

'My sons grew up strong and vigorous; they hunted and shot, scaled the mountains and explored the forests, excelling in every active and manly sport.

I saw but little of them—they feared more than they loved me, and no wonder it was so, for I was a hard father, and the only good I did for them was to refrain from making them ride with me in my raids against neighbouring barons and others whom I deemed it proper to attack when it suited me. Their mother had begged me to leave them at home on these occasions, and I did this little in atonement for the wrong I had done that angel-woman. But my daughter was always with me when I was at home. Home would not have been home without her. She was the light and life of the castle. Everybody and everything loved her. The horses knew her footsteps and neighed when she passed their stable—the dogs preferred a friendly pat from her to the caresses of anybody else—whilst as for my retainers, there was not one who would not willingly have laid down his life for the young Baroness.'

'We had an affliction to endure together which rendered us still more dear to each other, for my daughter loved me; yes, me, the cruel wretch, the plague of the neighbourhood, the Red Baron! She loved me, I say, and it is my one happy thought now to have been loved by that sweet saint. The affliction I mean was the loss of my second boy Frederick. As if to punish me especially, he fell from the very cliff from which I had caused my poor wife's lover to be thrown, and was killed in the same manner as that unhappy wretch. The blow fell upon me with unusual severity, for I had always made the boy my favourite of the two brothers, and the manner and place of the accident affected

me strangely. Christina was my only comfort, for Rudolf was not confident enough with me, or perhaps not fond enough of me, to play the part of consoler.

'It was during this period of mourning that your compatriot came amongst us. Sir Smith the Englander, we called him. You had some internal wars going on among yourselves at that time. So, at least, I gathered from his conversation. Your king had an enemy which was called Parliament, and as he tried to persuade and cajole his enemies instead of cutting off their heads, as I should have done, he naturally lost his own. I remember Sir Smith and I used often to talk over the matter, for he had fought, had Sir Smith, for the king, and had lost home and lands when the cause failed; thus it was he came to us. Far and wide had he wandered in search of adventure, until he came into our country, and heard (as who had not heard?) of the Red Baron. He was instantly seized with an uncontrollable desire to make my acquaintance. Thunder and lightning! *that* was not difficult to do, and he took the right way, too. One day, when we were hunting the wolf in the great forest which you passed some two miles beyond the village, we suddenly perceived a stranger amongst us. He bore him right gallantly in the chase, and when one monster of a wolf was at bay, he it was who outstripped our lazy knaves and slew the beast with his own hand in a manner which mightily pleased me. So instead of killing him, as I should most likely have served a stranger whom I did not fancy, I took to Sir Smith very kindly, brought him home with me and established him in the castle. He

soon made himself quite at home. It is the way with you Englanders wherever you are. You think the world is made for you to enjoy, and you *do* enjoy it wherever you find yourselves, without caring for anybody else in the matter. Sir Smith was an Englander all over. He ate and drank with the best of us, he shot and fished and hunted, and he was good at all those little home amusements which women appreciate. He treated Christina, not as a child or a fool, as men often treat women, but as a reasonable being and his own equal. He talked to her, not in extravagant compliments and upon nonsensical subjects, but about books, and flowers and birds, things about which he knew much, and she, poor child, was able to understand and to learn; then he sang with her and rode with her, he drew sketches of her favourite views, he admired her pet dogs and horses; in short, he did everything which an agreeable man could do to make himself dear to the maiden he loved. He succeeded. How should he not succeed? My child saw but few persons of her own rank, and certainly none who could compare with the Englander.

'Sir Smith had travelled much; he knew more of men and things than most people whom I have met. He acquired over me some influence, though not enough to make me alter my life, even if he had set his whole wits to work in order to effect that object, which he certainly never did. But I liked him well enough to allow him to go on as he was doing at the castle, though I might have known that if things went on as he wished, it would end in his carrying off from me the treasure and comfort of my life. But in

truth, I did not often think of that matter, and when I did, I said to myself, "Mine is a rough life. Some day enemies may prevail against me. Better the girl were wedded to the Englander and far away before such an evil day came upon our house." So I let things go on. Christina became more and more fond of the Englander, and he was evidently devoted to her.

'There was one person, however, who took a different view of the matter. Rudolf was very warmly attached to his sister; from the earliest hours of childhood they had been companions and friends. When I was enraged with the lad, which was often the case upon slight cause, it was Christina who always stood between him and my wrath; their mother had bid him take care of and watch over his sister, the one little lamb left to grow up in the nest of wolves which my castle might well have been called, and to stand by her whenever she needed a friend. Well did Rudolf fulfil the charge. If her finger ached, he would have ridden night and day in search of a remedy, and his life would have been freely risked in her service at any moment.

'Well, Rudolf did not like the Englander. I did not know how it first began, nor can I now say which, if either, was in fault. Perhaps Sir Smith took not enough notice of the boy at first, and Rudolf was of an age when boys like to be thought men, and to be noticed by men. Then, no doubt, the lad grew jealous when he found how much of his sister's time was monopolised by the stranger, and how she gradually grew to prefer his company even to that of her brother. I saw, now and then, how things were going, but took

no pains to stop it. Why should I interfere? All would go on rightly, I doubted not, and it rather amused me to see Rudolf lose his temper before the cool Englander, who always had the best of it if they came to hot words. There was no wise counsellor to set matters straight. Christina, poor child, did her best, but she seemed to have lost her influence with her brother in this case. There had once been a chaplain in the castle, who might have been of use at this time. But in the earlier part of my career, I found chapels and chaplains somewhat in my way, so I shut up the former and kicked the latter out of the place. He used to remonstrate against certain practices of mine which I did not choose to relinquish; so out he went, and none of his kind had entered the castle for many a long day.

'At last matters came to a crisis. Sir Smith formally demanded the hand of my daughter in marriage. I had nothing to say against it, the more particularly as he did not propose to take her away from me for some time. His own country, he said, was in confusion: he could not return there until times should be quieter and the King should have his own again, and therefore he would stay with me for some time at least after my daughter should have become his wife. So I gave my consent, and it was settled that the marriage should take place. Some difficulty, indeed, there was about getting a priest, for those gentry did not love me, nor I them, and they were not over ready to trust themselves within the clutches of the Red Baron. This obstacle, however, would no doubt have been got over, if other events had not occurred.

'Rudolf was furious at the projected wedding. He abused Sir Smith so that Christina had to interpose to prevent words coming to blows. He used to me—to *me*—his father and the Red Baron whom everyone feared, words which made me mad. Never would he have done so had I treated him as a father should have done. I should have remembered this and been more gentle than I was. But I was beside myself with rage. I struck the boy: had I had a weapon in my hand at the moment, I tremble to think what might have been the consequence. I struck him—he rushed from my presence and left the castle that night.

'What was to be done? He did not return next morning, nor next, nor the morning after. We looked everywhere; we asked everybody; no one knew or had heard anything of the lad. We had not newspapers in those days as there are now. To-day, if a dog or a watch is lost, the world knows it soon by means of advertisements printed everywhere, and the chances are that more dogs and watches are brought to you than you thought would have been lost by all the country in the time, especially if you have offered enough reward. But in the good old times in which I lived you might lose your son or yourself (if that were possible) and no one would hear of it out of your own immediate neighbourhood except by the merest chance. So we could hear no news of Rudolf, and those who cared about him were very uncomfortable.

'I confess that I did not quite like it myself, for I felt I had not done all I might have done for the

boy, and now that he was my only son—the sole hope of my house, I was by no means anxious to lose him. At the same time, I am bound to say that I was so selfish and bad at heart, that so long as things went smoothly and easily with myself, I did not much care what became of anybody else. And as to my successor, what, after all, did it matter to me whether it was my son or not? *I* must be gone and *my* fun over, anyhow, before he came to the castle and estates, and therefore it seemed to me that as far as I was concerned it mattered little what happened here afterwards. The true philosophy I held to be this—to enjoy oneself as much as possible and let other people look out for themselves. You needn't smile contemptuously. I know *now* that I was wrong, and that happiness *must* depend on other people, and that to make others happy is the best and truest way of being happy oneself. But I didn't know it *then*, or at all events I didn't act upon it. So when Rudolf disappeared I was not nearly so much grieved as might have been expected in the case of a better man.

'Christina, however, was inconsolable. She cried her dear eyes out at the loss of her brother. She was sure he was dead. Nothing could comfort her, and as to her marriage, she would not hear of it; so that the boy had really taken the very best way in the world to prevent the alliance he so much disliked. It was rather hard upon the Englander. Nothing that he could say was of the slightest use. No—he must bring back her brother before she would have anything more to say to him. This was doubly hard upon Sir Smith, because, in the first place, he had not

the remotest idea where to find the lost sheep, and in the second place, if he had been able to do so, he was the very last shepherd with whom it would have returned.

'So you may suppose that things went on rather uncomfortably at the castle, and as a natural consequence, I became very cross and morose. To make a diversion, therefore, I determined upon undertaking an expedition against a certain neighbour of mine who possessed a castle some fifteen or twenty miles distant from my own. To say the truth, he had not given me any very grave cause of offence. He had indeed flogged one of my vassals whom his people had caught in the act of robbing a hen-roost, but as barons usually stood by each other in such matters, and I should undoubtedly have hanged the fellow in similar case, there was not much to complain of. But when one is looking for an excuse, one can always make anything serve for one, and this did as well as a better.

'I pretended to be very indignant at the rough usage which my worthy retainer had received; and without any preliminary message of defiance, I gathered together my men-at-arms, summoned my vassals, and rode off at the head of over a hundred and fifty of the greatest rascals you could have found in this or any other country. They all had a keen eye for plunder, no scruples of any kind to interfere with their due execution of the work before them, and no merit that I could honestly attribute to them except fidelity to their feudal chief and unflinching courage in the hour of battle. I had wanted Sir

Smith to accompany me, but he had excused himself upon various grounds, the real reason of course being that he wished to stay with Christina. In an ill-omened hour I permitted this, and leaving a dozen men, which in those days were ample to guard the castle of a man so much dreaded as I was, I rode forth with the rest upon the expedition which I had planned.

'My worthy neighbour had somehow or other got an inkling of my intention, so that I had not the pleasure of taking him by surprise, as I had fully intended to have done. There was, and is, (though it has been widened and improved since the days I speak of) a certain pass some twelve miles from this castle, through which you emerge from the mountains immediately upon the only place for some miles where you can conveniently cross the river. It was at that time rather an easy pass to defend. The passage between the sides of the mountain were narrow; the rocks rose perpendicularly on either side, and between the mouth of the passage and the river a space of some thirty or forty yards intervened, and on either side of the road the ground, naturally rough and rugged, sloped upwards, and at the distance of a very few yards was covered with thick brushwood and stunted trees such as often grow on the side of our mountains.

'Nothing could have been more easy than to defend this pass. A few rocks and trunks of trees placed at the river end would have checked the advance of troops. The cliffs above the passage might have been held, whence rocks could have been rolled down upon the invaders, and as the passage would not allow more than half a dozen men to walk abreast,

a comparatively small force might have held an army at bay, whilst if the passage had once been forced, a body of men well placed in the woods on either side would have proved most awkward and inconvenient to any attacking party.

'Through the pass I had to go, and as I neared it I could not help thinking how easily what I have described might have been done if the baron whom I was about to attack had received warning of my coming. I knew not that he *had* such warning, but still less did I know that he had not the wisdom or knowledge of war to take the measures to which I have alluded. Had he done so, I and my people could hardly have avoided a complete and most humiliating defeat.

'Unfortunately for him, however, my neighbour was what you Englanders would call a thundering fool. Instead of occupying the pass or the wood, he, having some foolish scruple about staying in his own territory, which the river divided from mine, remained on the other side, and drew up his forces on the open plain about a quarter of a mile from the ford, with a forest behind him and a morass on one side. The consequence was that I was enabled to pass the dangerous point and to cross the river with my men without any difficulty. Then the baron whom I was about to invade thought it was time to move, and accordingly advanced in front of his men, waving a white flag in token of his wish to parley. It was never my habit, however, to do anything of the kind when once I had set out upon an expedition for a certain purpose. Parleying is only "jawing" one against the

other, to see who can get the best of it, and little good comes of jawing, any day in the week. As for his white flag, I didn't care a rush about that, and if I had thought there was any danger of my followers being beaten by his, I should very likely have taken advantage of his folly in bearing the white flag himself, let him come near and then captured him as a hostage for the behaviour of his men. But I saw at a glance that we were as strong as they, and I was impatient to be at them; so I paid no respect to his flag or him, but gave the word to charge at once.

'At it we went ding dong. The other chaps fought like mad, for they were in their own country, and as your English proverb says, "Every cock fights best on his own dunghill." But my cocks were more of the game breed than they were, and after about a quarter of an hour, they gave way and fled in every direction. My blood was up by this time, and I laid about me right and left, cutting and slashing the beggars like anything, until at last I encountered the baron himself. He would fain have avoided the battle even then.

'"What have I done?" he cried. "Why are you thus attacking me and my poor people?"

'I only laughed in his face, and rode him down forthwith, for I was better mounted and a stronger man withal. Then I pursued his men and knocked as many of them on the head as I could, after which I had him bound with his legs under his horse's belly, and rode forward in triumph to his castle, which, being ill defended, soon yielded to my victorious army. Oh! we had a rare time of it then! We sacked the old place from top to bottom, and my fellows said they

never had better fun in their lives, for there was everything a soldier could want, and the only drawback was that the thing came to an end too soon. I will not enter into all the details of the transaction, for they might perhaps disgust you, and are not now pleasant for me to look back upon.

'We did the thing completely, at any rate, and as the baron had few goods or people left to add to the enjoyment of his after life, I thought it would be a real kindness to put an end to him. So I first let the rascal whom he had flogged inflict the same punishment upon him, in front of his own castle, which the fellow did with a will, and then, as I rather disliked to see one of my own rank so degraded, I hung both of them together from the battlements. It was an awful "sell" for my knave, who thought I had undertaken the whole business for his sake alone. But I told him it was but fair that if both were flogged, both should be hung, and I think the baron saw the force of the argument if the other did not. At all events, I turned them both off, and there was no one to dispute the justice of my sentence.

'But scarcely had the deed been done, when I heard a voice behind me which took my thought and attention from the execution in which I had just delighted. A very old woman stood behind me on the battlements, close to a long narrow window in the castle wall. She was clad entirely in black, and was dressed like a nun, or some member of a religious order. How she came there I know not, for I thought we had routed out every man, woman, and child in the castle, and none of us had seen her before. There she was,

however, sure enough, and to this hour I remember the haughty, piercing, vengeful glare of her eyes as they were fixed upon me. She raised her arm and shook her aged fist at me with a vehemence unnatural in one of her years, whilst she uttered in a clear voice these unpleasant words :—

"I saw the Red Baron in th' hour of his pride,
The castle he sacked, and the baron he slew.
The hour of my vengeance I patiently bide,
'Tis near, when the Fates shall *his* Fortune undo.
Red Baron! thy triumph shall soon turn to tears;
With innocent blood have thine hands been imbued;
Go home, whilst these words shall still ring in thine ears,
The Boar shall be worried, and by his own brood!"

'You will agree with me that this was not a prophecy calculated to make one feel comfortable, or put one in a good humour with the prophetess. As soon, therefore, as I had recovered from my astonishment at being thus addressed, I cried out to my men-at-arms to seize the old hag, and hurl her from the battlements from which her master was already dangling.

'They attempted to execute my orders forthwith, but, with a smile of mingled scorn and malignity, she stepped through the narrow window behind her, and one of my people who rushed through after her, found to his cost that it overlooked a steep staircase inside at a height of some forty feet, down which he fell, and paid the penalty of his rashness with his life. It was evident, then, to us all, that the old woman had been no mortal, and indeed I afterwards learned that there was a legend in that family of an old abbess, a daughter of the house in days gone by, who usually made her appearance at the death of the head of the

house. As, in this instance, she found him perishing in a manner not likely to add much to the credit or dignity of the family, I suppose she thought she might as well say something nasty to the person who had caused his end. At all events, whatever her reason may have been, she gave vent to the speech which I have told you, and I confess that it did not improve my temper or spirits by any means.

'I stayed in the castle long enough to ransack it completely, which took me a couple of days, not so much on account of the quantity of booty in the building itself, but because of the cattle which had to be driven in, and moreover on account of my followers, who always required a little time for enjoyment when they had the luck to sack such a place. On the third day, however, I told them that it was high time we should be off, or our folks at home would certainly think we had met with some misfortune.

'I had not thought it necessary to send a messenger with the news of our success, partly because I expected to be back so soon, and partly because I was not over well pleased with the lack of interest which the Englander had shown in my expedition. In fact, he had seconded Christina's efforts to induce me to abandon my intention, pointing out to me that these raids were things discreditable in themselves, and likely some day to lead me into trouble, by drawing down upon me the united vengeance of those who would eventually become tired of being attacked one at a time and destroyed in detail. So I thought it would be quite time enough to tell Sir Smith in my own words what had happened, and tell him that at

least this particular baron could never join with others against me, as I had made a clear sweep of him and his once for all.

'We started leisurely about mid-day, and as the cattle we drove before us somewhat delayed our march it was well on in the afternoon before we reached the village near the castle. No one came out to meet us; but this was not surprising, for the villagers rather shunned than sought the presence of the Red Baron, and I marvelled not that I saw none of them. All was quiet, too, as I rode up the old avenue at the head of my men, and advanced up nearly to the castle gate. Then, all at once, a piercing shriek rang through my ears and filled my soul with terror. I knew—surely I knew—that voice. It was my own, my darling daughter whose lips had uttered the sound. But how shall I describe the mingled anguish and horror which it seemed to convey!

'I pushed forward at once across the drawbridge, which was down, and the castle gates were open. All was silent, but a wail, softer but if possible more heart-rending than the shriek I had first heard, smote upon my hearing as I neared the door. It seemed to come from the banqueting hall. The moments which elapsed whilst I hastily traversed the corridor were the most agonising in the whole of my earthly existence. I knew not what to expect, and I feared the worst. I rushed into the banqueting hall—what a sight met mine eyes! The bodies of several men lay here and there, who had evidently fallen after a severe struggle—and at the end of the room, near the head of the table, sat Christina—my own Chris-

tina—my lovely, my darling one—upon the floor, supporting a man's head and shoulders in her lap, and wailing over him like a mother over the child of her love. Frantically I rushed forward, and perceived that my daughter held in her arms the lifeless body of the Englander.

'Rage and astonishment filled my heart. How had he been slain? Who had been the savage combatants the traces of whose recent fray were so plainly perceptible around me? Had treason been at work, or had any open enemy stormed the castle and slaughtered my guest in my absence?' Dead enough he was in all conscience, with a gaping wound in his breast enough to have let out half a dozen lives if he had happened to have them. My chief thought was for my daughter. I called to her. She answered but by an incoherent moan.'

'I threw myself upon the ground by her side. I spoke to her in my tenderest and softest voice, and applied to her all the most affectionate epithets by which I had been used to address her since the days of her earliest childhood. All was in vain. She shrank from my caresses with a shuddering glance of fear, and remained deaf to all my entreaties that she would speak and tell us whence this dreadful calamity had befallen us. Alas! it was but too plain that the catastrophe was greater than the loss of the Englander, though for that I should have grieved sincerely. The light of reason had for ever been extinguished in my beloved daughter, and she would never more know the father who so adored her, and whose sole hope in life she had been.

'It was from the lips of a wounded retainer that I at last gathered the truth; and sad enough it was when known and realised. It seems that for some time past some of my discontented vassals, leaguing themselves with those of other lords whose masters I had at different times dispossessed or slain, had taken refuge in the great forests beyond the village. They had, I suppose, had friends among the peasants, and although they occasionally committed depredations, yet for the most part they carried on their robbing and marauding business so stealthily and craftily, that I had no idea of the existence of such a formidable band as they had become.

'In an evil hour, my boy Rudolf formed the acquaintance of some of these men. Stung by my neglect, and beyond measure irritated at my preference for Sir Smith, and the influence which the latter had acquired over his sister, Rudolf began by absenting himself, as if on hunting excursions, from the castle, in order to join these men in their lawless expeditions. Ere long, as he was the only man of rank among them, and a brave lad withal, they elected him as their captain. It was very shortly after this event that the outbreak occurred of which I have told you, and which resulted in my son's flight from the castle. He went direct to the haunts of his freebooting band, and declaring the insult to which he had been subjected on the Englander's account, vowed vengeance on the latter. His followers were only too ready to encourage him in such a design, but were uncertain how to carry it out.

'Rudolf, however, was a youth full of ability, and

moreover determined to accomplish his purpose. Alas! had I ever taken care that he should receive instruction, had I ever attended to him myself, had his sainted mother been spared, how different it would all have been! Neglected, slighted, uneducated, untaught save by the early lessons of his dead mother and the natural instincts of good which Christina imparted to all around her, the boy had no self-control, nothing to draw him back from the evil purpose which he meditated.

'He drilled and disciplined his band as well as he was able, and taught them to rely upon him and obey his directions. They did so only too well. My departure was watched, and the very next day measures were taken to surprise the castle. Something postponed the attack until the night before my return, so that had I dealt more mercifully with my neighbour, or even spared their flocks and herds to his people, the evil might yet have been averted. But it was not to be! On that fatal evening, the full force of the robber band, some fifty men, fell suddenly upon the unsuspecting garrison. It was the supper hour, and they were together in the banqueting hall when the attack commenced.

'Taken at such disadvantage, resistance against a force four times their number was simply impossible. I gathered from my retainer that Sir Smith, the lion-hearted man that he was, performed prodigies of valour, and that no less than five of the robbers fell by his hand. They say, but I cannot think it true, that it was Rudolf, the remorseless Rudolf himself, who struck the fatal blow which at last felled him to

the earth. Be this as it may, however, it is certain that Christina entered the hall as he fell, and that the horror of that awful moment was too much for her pure and peaceful soul. Her father's people beaten down and her affianced spouse slain, and that by a brother's hand, was a sight which would have shaken nerves more rudely strung together than those of my darling child. What she said or did I know not. At any rate, Rudolf was so struck to the heart with remorse at the result of his vengeance that he fled the castle with his followers, and my daughter had remained there with the Englander's body until the hour of our arrival.

'You may imagine my feelings. Rage and despair struggled for the mastery in my bosom. Anon I cursed the wretched boy who had brought this misery upon our house, anon I directed my imprecations against the abominable old hag who had prophesied it. At one moment I prayed and implored my darling Christina to be to me what she had been before, at another I called frantically upon Sir Smith to return. Alas! that was what he could never do. They had made sure work of him, and I wished at one time that I had been in his place.

'The rest of my story will not take long to tell. It soon became known that she whom everybody loved, she who was the pride and delight of the castle, worshipped by the rough soldiery, adored by her fond father, that she was mad, hopelessly mad, and that instead of the sweet smile and kindly word which had ever been ready for each and all of us, nought could

be heard from her sweet lips in the future but the vacant laugh and wild shriek of insanity.

'Then came the next blow. Had Rudolf returned, I would have forgiven him all, even then: was he not my last child? my last child with reason and sense left to him? Despite my terrible grief, I could not have avoided calling him to me, and sharing my affliction with the last of my race. But it was not to be. The unhappy boy, hearing of his sister's melancholy fate, lost all desire to live and abandoned himself to the pangs of remorse. Whilst still I mourned the Englander and yet longed to receive once more his slayer to my bosom, fate dealt me the cruel stroke she had in store and robbed me of my only remaining boy. Unable to endure his misery, he sought in death the peace which life had denied him, and his body was found in the deep lake near the forest, where he had drowned himself in sheer despair. My cup was now nearly full. I had but one aim and object left, namely to alleviate, if possible, the condition of my idolised Christina.

'I tell you, stranger, that I passed moments, hours, aye, days of agony which might have atoned, I think, for greater crimes even than mine, if any atonement for crimes could be made by mortals. Comfort, or even relief to my child, was impossible. Again and again would I visit her in the futile hope that some returning gleam of reason might enable her once more to speak to me—if but one single sentence—as of old. It was denied.

'Nor was this the whole of my sorrow. I have said that we were constant companions in the past days. I

have told you that she was my light and life, and that she loved the father who so worshipped the very ground she trod on. Fancy if you can the agony which racked my soul when I found that my presence had now become hateful to her. She constantly shuddered at my approach, and fled, moaning and wailing, into the farthest corner of the room, where she would crouch down as if to get as far as possible away from me. What pangs of anguish did I endure at such moments! It was but too evident that, for some inscrutable reason or other, I was associated in her mind with the misfortune which had befallen her, and had so become positively hateful to my darling child. Often and often have I, the rough soldier, the cruel victor, the Red Baron, crouched like a whipped hound outside my daughter's door, listening for some sound from her lips which might not be one of sorrow or of terror. My punishment was heavy indeed, and I see you think so by the look of pity which comes over your countenance.

'Well, the end came at last. As I had ceased to lead them on expeditions in which plunder, if not honour, was to be gained, my followers began to fall away from me, and I knew that I was spoken of in terms the reverse of respectful even in my own castle. Now and then I rallied for a while, swore a few great oaths, and flogged or hung a rascal or two who seemed insubordinate. But this state of things could not continue. The men began to desert, and within three months from the events I have been narrating I had not above half the number of retainers at command which I could have summoned to my banner

before that awful day of retribution. Still, I cared little for this. The hope and pleasure of my life had gone by, and I was beginning to feel that the seed I had sown was bringing up a crop which I had never expected to reap. I dragged on my wretched existence in this manner, seldom quitting the castle and neither hunting nor riding forth on raids as of old. My only thought was of Christina, although, poor child, she could never more be conscious of my continued care and love.

'Well, as I have said, the end came at last. Although she was tended with the greatest devotion by some of her female domestics, it was impossible that they could for ever guard her with the same vigilance. One day, deceived by her apparent tranquillity, they were less watchful than usual, and Christina escaped from the rooms in which she had been strictly confined ever since her madness had been confirmed. The first thing she did was to go to the banqueting-room, where she had last seen her affianced husband, and where had been enacted the terrible tragedy which I have described. As the poor Englander had been buried for some months, she naturally didn't find him there, so she sat down and began to wail and sob upon the very spot where I had found her with his head in her lap.

'After a while her attendants missed her and came in anxious terror to tell me of her flight. In their company I sought her, and after an ineffectual search in the upper part of the house, descended with them into the banqueting-room and there saw my darling sitting as I have told you. The moment she saw me

enter, her worst paroxysms seemed to return. Perhaps to her disordered brain there recurred the awful scene which had taken place in that room, and the remembrance of my previous entry excited her diseased imagination and drove her to fury. Anyhow, she leaped from the ground and with a wild yell rushed up the front staircase.

'We followed as fast as we could, but she was before us all the way, and when she reached the staircase on which were her rooms, instead of entering them, she rushed to one of the large open embrasures of the castle wall, turned round upon us for an instant, waved her hand with a scornful, mocking laugh, and springing through the embrasure was in another instant dashed in pieces upon the pavement a hundred feet below. My life virtually ended at that moment.

'I can tell you no more of my own recollection; but as you will not be satisfied without knowing what really became of me, I will relate what I now know to have happened. I did not appear the next morning. They knocked at my door for some time, then opened it, and found the room empty. They called me all over the house without obtaining any answer, and at last, on searching the rooms which my lost Christina had occupied, they found me hanging from an iron bar which ran across the top of one of the windows, to which I had made fast an old shawl of my darling's and had contrived to arrange it in a slip knot round my neck in such a manner as to need no other executioner. This was the end of my life—if not of my troubles. Of course I have had to haunt

the castle ever since; and I am sure you will agree with me that I have quite as good reason for doing so as the vast majority of ghosts have for frequenting the various localities which they honour with their presence.'

Here the little red man came to a stop, and having again let his pipe out, rekindled it and tossed off another glass of madeira whilst he awaited the answer of his companion.

'My dear sir,' remarked the latter, 'I do not know how to thank you sufficiently for the remarkably interesting story with which you have just favoured me. Be assured that I sympathise most truly and deeply with your sorrows, and feel sincerely for all you have endured. Allow me at the same time to observe, always with the greatest respect, that after all, your present fate is not so bad as it might be, or entirely devoid of those consolations which your condition permits you to receive. I take it there are few ghosts with such venison pasties and madeira at command, and none, I am sure, more capable of doing justice to both than your worthy self.'

'Ah!' replied the other with a sigh, 'that is all very true; but meat and wine do not confer happiness upon ghosts any more than upon mortals. However, as the hour is getting late, and I must be out of this by cock-crow according to all ghostly precedent, I will take the liberty of wishing you a very good night, and trust that your dreams will be light and cheerful.'

'I am sorry to part thus, Baron,' replied the traveller, 'but you must of course fix your own hours

in your own house; wherefore I will not seek to detain you.'

Upon this the little red man got up, pushed back his chair from the fireside, yawned, stretched his arms, took one more glass of madeira (which happened to be the last in the bottle), put his pipe in his pocket, and after nodding familiarly to his companion, left the room and shut the door after him. Being very tired and not a little sleepy, our traveller did not sit up much longer. He found a certain amount of covering upon the bed, and having thrown his cloak over him by way of an extra blanket, managed to compose himself comfortably to sleep, and never had a better night's rest in his life. The sun was shining brightly into his room next morning when he awoke, and for the first few moments he could not remember where he was or how he came there. Gradually, however, he recollected all the events of the previous evening, and began to wonder how he could have been on such good terms with the ghost of an old baron, and to think how lucky he had been to fall in with so hospitable a spirit.

There was no doubt at all about the reality of the thing. There were the two chairs as they were left the night before; there were the glasses, and there were the bottles, empty indeed, but still imparting, by their pleasant fragrance, a knowledge of what they had recently contained. There, too, better than all at that moment, was a fragment of the mighty pasty, sufficient for our traveller to break his fast upon, which he did very shortly after he had completed his toilet; then he took a look into one or two of the other rooms, but

without seeing anything particular, and next descended to the banqueting-hall, where he pictured to himself the scene which the Red Baron had so vividly described.

Then, having no further occasion to stay there, and finding that his calling out to the Red Baron produced no reply whatever, he came to two conclusions:—First, that ghosts would not come when called, especially in broad daylight; and secondly, that as he could not possibly stay there until the evening, he had better set forth on his travels without further delay. He did so accordingly, and if I had time to tell you, and thought you would care to hear, I could relate many other interesting adventures which happened to the traveller. However, I will not yield to the temptation to do so, but hasten on to the only other event in his journeyings which bears upon the present story.

It was some ten or a dozen years after the events which I have been relating, when this self-same traveller, grown, as you may perhaps think possible, somewhat older, but still stalwart in frame and fond of roaming abroad, came in his travels to the identical village near which stood the castle of the Red Baron. Things had changed, however, in that locality. There were plenty of peasants to be seen at the doors and windows of the cottages which formed the principal street of the village, and, more than that, there was a respectable inn at which accommodation could be found for man and beast.

Our traveller stood even more in need of this than in the olden days, for he came not alone upon this

occasion. A fair young girl was with him, upon whom he looked with the eyes of reverential love which showed that she stood towards him in near and dear relationship. She was his bride, whom he was taking over some of the ground which he had travelled in his old bachelor days, and as they drove up to the door of the little inn, her bright looks and his manly, happy face and bearing attracted the attention of the loiterers around the door.

Right glad was the host to see such guests, and to ascertain that they intended to pass the night at his house. The best fare which the country could produce was speedily placed before them, and the host himself took care to wait upon such distinguished personages. Just as they were about to commence their repast, the sound of a loud-toned bell burst upon their ears, ringing, as it seemed, at only a short distance from the place where they were seated.

'Ha!' said the gentleman, after listening attentively for a moment, 'I have, as you know, my darling, a pretty good memory for places and distances, and if anyone had asked me, I should have sworn that the bell we have just heard came from somewhere very close to the old ruined castle about my visit to which I have so often told you.'

'Milord is right,' here obsequiously interposed the fat host. 'The bell *does* come from the castle, but it is not "ruined" now, though perhaps it deserved to be called so some few years back. Has Milord then been here before?'

'Yes, certainly,' replied the gentleman, 'and I

thought I could not be far wrong as to the direction from which that bell came. But how is it that the castle is not ruined? Has it been sold, or burned and rebuilt, or what?'

'Neither the one thing nor the other, Milord,' returned the host; 'but the late owner died some three years ago, and the present Baron, who was his cousin, had money of his own before, and has thoroughly restored the old place.'

'But how—what do you mean?' asked the gentleman. 'Who was the late owner, and how comes the present man to be a Baron?'

'I do not know what Milord means,' observed the host somewhat stiffly. 'The Barons of the family of Bundelhausen have held the castle and estates for long, long years—most likely from a time very soon after the Flood, if not before.'

'How can that be?' enquired the traveller somewhat incredulously. 'I thought the line had come to an end.'

'Not so,' returned the other. 'But pray how long is it since Milord was here?'

'Some ten or twelve years ago,' responded the guest.

'Ah! that would be in the time of the last Baron. Milord might well think the place was deserted and the family come to an end. The late Baron was a curious fish altogether. Heaven rest his soul! He was what you call "a character," and a very queer one too. Although he had fine estates, good shooting, and one of the best cellars of wine in the country, he lived in two little rooms at one corner of the house, and let the whole place go sadly out of repair.

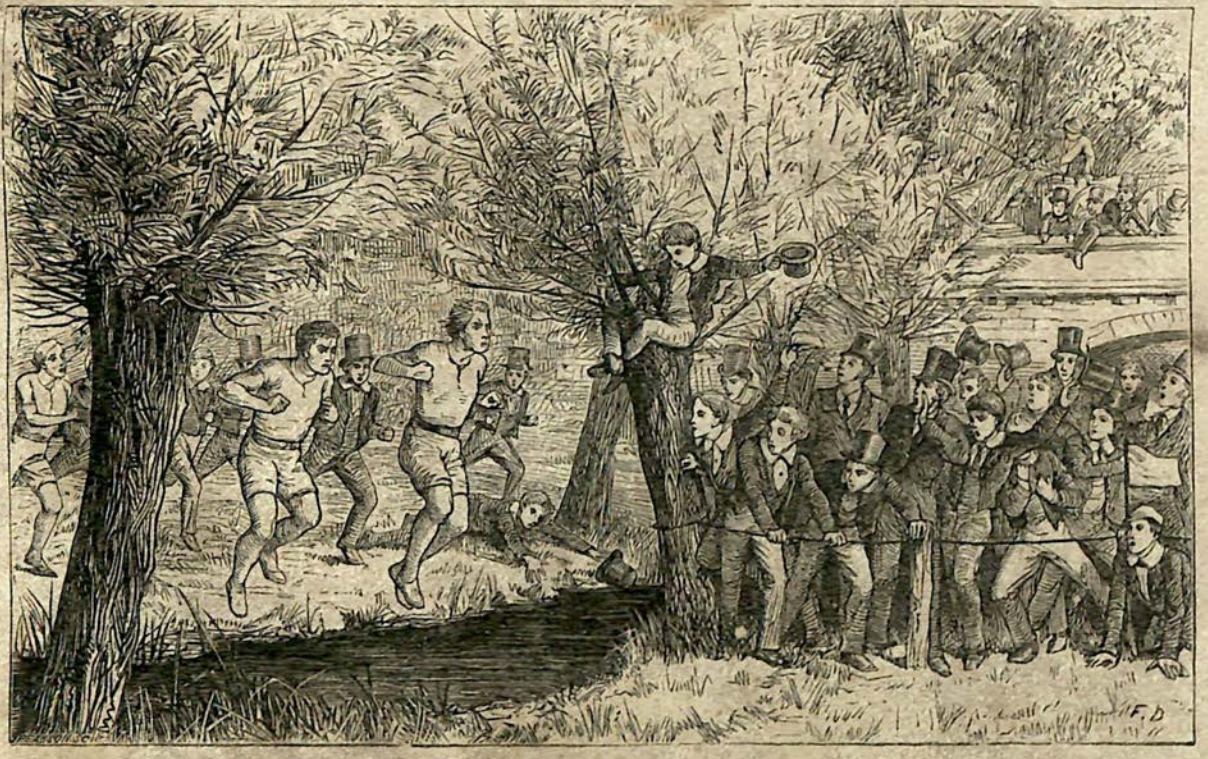
'His fancy was to dress himself always entirely in red; and if he could ever get anyone up to the old castle, he would indulge himself with telling the most frightful and improbable tales. His great delusion was that he had lived many years ago and committed great crimes, whereas a better little man, barring his eccentric habits, never existed; he gave away heaps to the poor and no one had a word to say against him. Poor man! he was his own enemy—he had but one fault, and that was his love of wine, and I have been told that this it was which carried him off at the last.'

As the host spoke, the lady could not avoid stealing a sly glance at her companion, whose countenance wore an expression so extremely comical that at last, she burst into a fit of laughter which greatly disconcerted the poor host. He begged ten thousand pardons if he had said anything to offend the distinguished visitors—perhaps they were related to the noble family of which he had been speaking—if so, he trusted he had said nothing disrespectful of them: such had been far, very far, from his intention, and he hoped he might be forgiven. The lady and gentleman both assured him that he was entirely innocent of having offended them in the slightest degree, and that they were not fortunate enough to be able to claim the most distant relationship with the family in question. When they were alone, however, the lady resumed her laughter, in which her husband was forced to join in spite of himself.

'There,' said she with an air of triumph, 'did I not always tell you that your ghost story was like all the rest of the same sort, and only required a little

more information in order to be cleared up in the most satisfactory manner? What do you say *now* to your Red Baron, Sir Smith, Christina and all the rest of them? What have you to say for yourself *now*, sir?' And the lady laughed again.

'My darling,' replied her husband with a loving look, 'ghost or no ghost, nothing can make me disbelieve in the venison pasty and old madeira, which were to my mind much better than the story. But,' he added with a rueful look, shaking his head as he spoke, 'I might have known that such a kick could never have been given by a ghostly foot!'



THE TWO ETONIANS.

VII.

THE TWO ETONIANS.

I.

A PLEASANT, mellow autumn day, with enough sun to remind you of the summer which had just passed by, and a freshness in the air which at the same time warned you of the coming winter. A bracing air withal, and a day which tempted everyone who had any life or spirit in him to shut up his books, put away his papers, and rove abroad beneath the open skies of Heaven. Such a day it was that beamed upon the Eton world (never mind in what year) upon the occasion of the School Steeple-chase. The Flat-race had been run a week ago, the Hurdle-race was over also, and this was the last 'event' in the way of athletic sports which was to 'come off' that half. Such an occasion, and such weather, was sure to bring out the whole school—or all fellows who had any sport in them—to see the fun; and accordingly as soon as the big college clock had sounded the hour of twelve, you saw boys scampering out of school in every direction with even greater haste than usual, and in a few minutes more, having deposited their books at their respective 'Tutors'' or 'Dames'' houses, trooping off down the Slough road in numbers, bound to the particular place from which each had determined that the

best part of the race was to be seen. Some would like to see the start, and run behind the competitors as far as they could. Some preferred to witness one jump, some another, and the majority gathered in 'the Field,' where was the winning-post—for, although the place of the start was varied from year to year according to the state of the ground, or the fancy of those to whom fell the duty of arranging the course, the School Steeple-chase would not have been the real thing at all unless the last jump had been the old 'school jump' over Chalvey, and the winning post in 'the Field,' hallowed by the memory of many a hard-fought football match, and dear to the heart of every Etonian.

Upon the present occasion the start was in the Datchet direction, and after a two-mile circuit over a line of country by no means light, the Slough road had to be crossed, and the last half mile was straight to the winning-post. It was a trying course, and only about fourteen boys had entered for it; young heroes all of them, prepared to face the ordeal with undaunted courage. As the day of the race drew near, however, several had dropped out of the list from one reason or another: a sprained ankle had incapacitated one, a hasty summons home had caused another's absence, and perhaps one or two more had judged their chance too small to make it worth their while to run.

However that may have been, it is certain that upon the appointed day only nine came to the scratch, between whom the hopes and fears of their brother Etonians were divided. Of these there were five fellows who may be said to have been decidedly the

favourites. Oxley, who was 'in the Boats,' and high up in the fifth form, was a tall strongly-built boy, with perhaps a trifle too much flesh on him, but with plenty of muscle and, so fellows said, lots of pluck. Sundridge, also a 'Wet-bob' (according to the Eton expression to signify a boy who prefers boating to cricket); Penliman, a spare, thin boy, in the same remove with Oxley, and reputed to be very fast; Moore, a short thick-set boy, who looked as if he could last; and Ethelston, a 'Dry-bob,' and one of the eleven. Each of these five had many supporters: the 'Aquatics' were divided between Oxley and Sundridge; the 'Dry-bobs' between Ethelston and Penliman; whilst Moore, who had not yet attained to the dignity of the fifth form, had many partisans among the 'lower boys,' who would have considered his victory their own. It is unnecessary to speak of the other four starters, who had probably entered rather for the credit of the thing, than with any hope of winning, since the above-named five were confessedly the best.

Great then was the excitement when the long-expected day arrived and the relative merits of the competitors were about to be proved. It may easily be understood that the latter were themselves not among the least excited: no light honour was it accounted to be the winner of the School Steeple-chase, and if the choice had been offered to any boy of either bearing off this honour or being 'sent up for good' half a dozen times, I have little doubt that, in the great majority of cases, the choice would have been in favour of the athletic as opposed to the scholastic distinction. Be that as it may, however, the five

boys between whom the race lay were as anxious as to the result as boys ought to be under such circumstances. Each had paid attention, for some weeks past, to his condition of body so far as to eschew heavy puddings, jam tarts, and such other edibles as are generally supposed to be prejudicial to wind and speed. An Eton boy's 'training' is seldom of a very rigorous character, but in this instance the runners had not only exercised a wise abstinence from that species of diet known to Etonians as 'sock,' but there were rumours that several of them had gone so far as to take an occasional run before breakfast, and it was mysteriously whispered that wonderful trials of speed had been secretly made with certain 'cads' of sporting celebrity. However this may have been, upon the appointed day the whole nine appeared at the scratch, and a start was satisfactorily accomplished.

The first jump was a ditch of peculiarly uninviting character; the banks were somewhat rotten, the width was somewhat great, and the weeds which appeared upon the surface of the water had a muddy and unpleasant look about them which was anything but tempting. The depth of water, however, was not great, and it was a question whether a scramble through the ditch was not likely to take less out of a boy than a jump. So thought Oxley and Moore, who both ran through instead of jumping over, whilst Ethelston, Penliman, and Sundridge took the jump, which they, with two other boys, succeeded in clearing, whilst two were left behind floundering in the mud. The next leap was over a small hedge and ditch, which was taken by the whole seven, and then

came a grass field with a flight of hurdles in the middle, which also were successfully managed.

The next field, however, was a piece of plough, at the end of which was a stake-and-bind hedge, newly done up and formidable to encounter. Across the plough gallantly charged the runners; but the pace was too good for the two unmentioned young gentlemen, who gave up the contest when they found the other five considerably ahead of them at the further end of the field. Somehow or other, all the five got safely over the hedge, and there was little to choose between them when they entered the next field. Penliman was the first, Moore the last of the five, for the next few fields, the other three running and jumping closely together.

So matters continued until they were within two or three fields of the Slough road, in which were congregated numbers of their brother Etonians, anxiously looking for their coming. On they came, charging a flight of hurdles up to which the ground rather rose and thus rendered the jump somewhat harder than would otherwise have been the case. Penliman was still first, but, miscalculating his distance and perhaps going too fast at his jump, he unluckily caught his foot in the top of the hurdle and came down, rather a nasty fall, upon the other side. He was fortunately not hurt, but at that critical moment the fall and the shock were fatal to his chances of success. The others were but a few yards behind him, and before he could get into his speed again, he was too far behind to have hopes that he could recover his lost ground.

Sundridge, Oxley, and Ethelston were almost abreast as they jumped the hurdles, and Moore only a dozen yards behind. Loud were the shouts of their respective friends as they neared the Slough road, which they crossed in the same order, and came into the straight running without change of position. Now was the moment for each boy to do his utmost; the eyes of Eton were upon him; the 'Field' was full of spectators; around the winning-post were crowds of boys, and not a few were gathered on the bank near the 'school jump,' in eager anticipation of that which would probably decide the fate of the race.

A roar of conflicting cries arose as the five boys were seen entering the last field before the final jump. Oxley is the first into that field, bursting through the small hedge and ditch without rising to the jump, Ethelston and Sundridge, side by side, are scarce a couple of yards behind him, and there goes up a mighty shout from the lower boys as little Moore comes with a will through the gap, gathers himself together like a good-plucked chap as he is, and reduces the distance between him and the others almost at every step. All four are nearly together when they are halfway across the field—who is it that falls behind? It is Sundridge—he has done his best, but the pace has been too good for him, and he is fairly 'pumped out.'

Now come the cries from the opposite bank louder and faster. 'Oxley!' 'Ethelston!' 'Moore!' shout a chorus of youthful voices, as the three gallantly struggle on towards the far-famed Chalvey. Twenty yards from the jump it becomes apparent that the race will be between two. Ethelston and Moore

leave Oxley labouring behind and charge the ditch almost abreast several yards before him. A roar from the 'Dry-bobs' and lower boys, and corresponding shouts of disgust from the 'Aquatics,' accompany the sight of this extinction of Oxley's hopes. Poor fellow! he was the biggest and the strongest of the five, but although he would have trained with good-will for a boat-race, he had probably held a land-race too cheap to secure it by equal care and abstinence from unwholesome diet. So his natural strength, though it served him well, failed him when tested beside boys who had bestowed more care upon making the most of themselves for this important occasion.

Neither of the two, however, was in a condition to enable him to clear the 'school jump' at the end of a fast-run steeple-chase. Both gallantly jumped, and both were struggling in the ditch at the same instant, but so close to the opposite bank that it was not long before each scrambled up into 'the Field' and headed for the winning-post. At this instant the excitement of the bystanders was tremendous, and their shouts positively deafening. As the two boys struggled manfully on, each straining every nerve, a crowd of friends and well-wishers ran by the side of each, encouraging their favourite by word and gesture, and perfectly wild with the intoxication of the moment.

Side by side kept the boys until within a very few yards of the winning-post. Then each made his great and final effort, and the result was no longer doubtful. Moore's pluck and strength had carried him well through the day; but Ethelston had the turn of speed, and in these last few yards he succeeded in leaving his

opponent behind, and passing the winning-post a full yard and a half before him, amid the enthusiastic cheering of the 'Dry-bobs' and the warm congratulations of his numerous friends. There were few boys more popular than Ethelston, and no one whose success would have given more general satisfaction. Moreover it had been a fast as well as a closely contested race, and everybody was pleased with the sport which had been afforded. The crowd in the Field slowly dispersed and straggled back to college.

For the rest of the day, at the dinner table, 'after four' and 'after six,' the events of the morning formed an occasional topic of conversation; but the school settled down to its work again as usual, and the steeplechase of that year ranked among the events of the past. The two boys who had been competitors at the last were thrown but little together during the rest of their Eton career. Ethelston being so high in the school, and Moore a 'lower boy,' it was only accidentally that they came in contact; and gradually the memory of the race and its results died away, overshadowed and eclipsed in the mind of the Eton world by other similar events and the varied excitement of Eton life. Had anyone prophesied that the two heroes of that day would again be brought together in another and still more desperate race, he would probably have been laughed at as a dreamer of dreams, and certainly so if he had described in imagination that which really occurred. Nevertheless the events of real life are oftentimes stranger than imagination itself, and so it would have proved in this case.

II.

The roll of the cannon was deafening the ears alike of the besieged and the besiegers of Sebastopol. The incessant roar, louder than the heaviest thunder-storm, had continued for days together, and the mighty armaments of England and France still darkly brooded over the Russian fortress, whilst anxious hearts at home beat fast and sad for warrior sons and brothers in that distant camp, whose place in the old home circle would, alas! be filled no more.

It was autumn again, but not such an autumn day as that which I have described as the day of the Eton Steeple-chase. A dark, heavy morning, with thick mists rolling up the side of the hill, and covering as with a shroud the camp of the allies. There had been heavy rain for days past, and the whole place was in a state of damp discomfort, unfavourable alike to health and to military operations. But the man who feels the grip of a foeman upon his neck has neither time nor inclination to wait for favourable conditions before trying to shake himself free. And Russia, with the enemy overhanging her great fortress and threatening the life of her empire with a death-stroke, had good reason for a supreme effort to rid herself once for all of the oppression.

On that night, then, trusting that vigilance might have relaxed in the allied camp, and the continuous bad weather might have lessened the discipline and dulled the martial ardour of her foes, Russia massed her forces and collected her artillery for one great attempt, the success of which would have been the most glori-

ous of warlike deeds in her history. Never were greater precautions taken to ensure that success, and perhaps never was such a surprise effected—a surprise of an invading army by the invaded.

There is no need for me to dwell upon the account of the struggle of that terrible day. In the dim mist of that November morning dense masses of Russian soldiery were poured upon the English position—a hand-to-hand battle of the most determined and fierce character followed, and victory appeared to waver between the contending parties. Unable to discern friend from foe, our men fought at terrible disadvantage;—the most dreadful confusion prevailed, and nothing but the undaunted resolution of the old island race could have made head against a brave and excited enemy so greatly outnumbering our troops.

How it fared with them has been already told in more eloquent words than mine. How positions were taken and re-taken, how the blood of England's best and bravest was poured out like water upon that fatal hill-side; how a terrible revenge was taken, and thousands of Russian bodies strewed the ground, and how the gallant Zouaves came up in time to scatter and drive back the masses of the foe into their fortress, baffled and defeated in their great effort—all this tale of thrilling interest is known by heart to the reader of English history. My task is but to tell of one of the incidents of that eventful day which forms the sequel to the Eton episode with which my tale commenced.

It happened during the heat and confusion of the battle that a Russian column advanced upon an English battery in the midst of a dense canopy of

smoke and fog. The gunners, uncertain whether they were approached by friend or foe, hesitated to fire. Their hesitation was fatal to themselves. The enemy charged up to the guns, cut down the men, and were about to capture the position. At this moment, English soldiers from two different sides of the battery caught sight of the affair, and rushed eagerly to the rescue. An officer led each of the parties, and here it was that the two steeple-chase competitors met for the first time since their old Eton days, for the officers were Moore and Ethelston. The latter had been with the army from the first, but Moore had only landed a day or two before, and neither knew that the other was so near.

Each rushed at the head of his men against the Russians, who were actually in possession of the battery, and almost together they met the foe. How different this race from the last in which the two had striven! No friendly faces, no joyous looks, no encouraging shouts of boyish companions, but dark, lowering visages of deadly foes, teeth closely clenched, and eyes full of threatening rage and hatred encountered the two officers as, outstripping their men, they hurled themselves against the enemy.

Not far behind, however, were their men, and a furious struggle at once commenced, for the artillerymen and their supports rallied to the charge again at the sight of reinforcements, and boldly pressed upon their assailants. It was like one of the combats of olden time; no breathing space for loading was allowed, but hand to hand the soldiers fought, and personal strength and skill, the value of which has been so

much lessened by the scientific engines of destruction which modern warfare employs, were brought prominently into play.

Whilst Ethelston was in the act of defending himself against the onslaught of three Russian soldiers, a fourth had raised his weapon and was about to strike a deadly blow upon his head with the butt-end, when the sword of a British officer, anticipating the action, was plunged into his heart. It was Moore, who immediately turned further to assist his comrade, and at that instant a glance of half-recognition passed between them. There was no time for more; the battle around them was too fierce and hot, the Russians still vastly outnumbering their opponents, and maintaining a desperate struggle for the possession of the battery.

Only a few paces from the spot where the two Etonians were engaged, a British officer of superior rank, overpowered and wounded, was with difficulty guarding himself from some dozen of the enemy who had singled him out as the object of their attack. Bareheaded, his grey locks streaming in the wind, and already beaten down upon one knee, it was evident that the old man could not long sustain the unequal combat. Almost at the same moment Ethelston and Moore caught sight of the scene, and rushed simultaneously forward, bursting through the intervening Russians with a desperate vehemence that overcame all resistance.

Ethelston, destined to be first in this as in the former less dangerous race, rushed headlong into the fray as recklessly as he would have dashed into

a 'bully' at Eton, striking with hearty goodwill at the savage foe. Too late, however, to save, he came but to avenge the old officer, in whose body met the bayonets of several foes even as Ethelston struck down the first within his reach. The rest turned furiously upon the new comer, and he and Moore found themselves instantly surrounded and exposed to a deadly onslaught on each side. Determined to sell their lives dearly, they stood back to back until a mound of dead and dying around them testified to their prowess and courage.

But what could two men do against the crowd which pressed upon them? Their revolvers did their work well, and right heavily did their swords fall upon the servants of the Czar. But the tide of battle rolled away from the battery, and at the spot where most bodies of the dead were found, where the battle had raged most fiercely, and the ground was trampled and torn by the feet of hundreds of men struggling for dear life, there lay the two Eton warriors side by side.

Probably they had recognised each other, and had had time to speak and to recall the past, for their hands were clasped together as if in a parting grasp of kindness and brotherhood. So it chanced that one of the burying parties was led by an old Etonian who had known the two, and he it was who found them as I have told. He it was, too, who witnessed the last sad rites, when the bodies of the two school-companions were laid in their resting place on 'Cathcart's Hill.' Together they died the death of the brave, and together they rest, but their memory lives fresh in

tender hearts at home, and love, that death cannot abate nor time diminish, still cherishes the recollection of these two of Eton's sons.

Alas! how many of her children had the old College to mourn throughout that terrible war! How many desolate homes, how many widowed hearts, still testify to the miserable results of insatiable ambition and baffled diplomacy! how many ancient trees bewail the rending of precious branches in the warlike tempest. But, amid all those who fought and fell during that eventful time, none fought more bravely, none gave their lives more freely, than the sons of Eton, and amongst the bold and fearless spirits whose deeds have added another wreath to the deathless glories of their country, none more bold, none more fearless, and none more regretted passed away than the two of whom my tale has told.

In a beautiful country home in one of England's midland counties, a venerable man mourns the hope of his house cut off, and the prop of his declining years removed when Ethelston fell; other sons he has, and other ties have wound themselves around him during his busy life, but his heart is buried in that tomb on Cathcart's Hill, and the first-born child will never be forgotten. And on the banks of Father Thames, so loved by Eton hearts, a quiet, homely, ivy-clad cottage contains a widowed mother who still weeps for her only son, and the lapse of nearly twenty years has not diminished the sisterly love with which the memory of Moore is ever cherished by the two companions of his early childhood.

So, alas! must it ever be; bright and joyous spirits,

kind hearts, and loving natures beam upon us only to pass away and leave us in darkness the deeper and sadder for the transient light. But Faith that cheers and Hope that lives for ever, comfort us in our heaviest sorrow, and the clouds which overhang us and darken our path-way whilst yet we journey through life, shall break away at last before the brightness of the never-setting sun in the land towards which we travel, when to cherish the memory of the loved ones who have gone before shall no longer be needful, for again they shall be with us, and the sorrowful partings we have suffered in the passage of Time shall be forgotten for ever in the glorious re-union of Eternity.

Ballantyne Press
BALLANTYNE, HANSON AND CO
EDINBURGH AND LONDON

00140936

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018